Thurlby Amos Colyer
Veteran

Michael Russert
Wayne Clark
Interviewers

Interviewed on August 23, 2005
Victor, New York

MR: This is a home interview, Victor, New York. It is the 23rd of August, 2005 at approximately 4:30 PM. Interviewers are Wayne Clark and Mike Russert. Could you give me your full name, your date of birth and place of birth, please?
TAC: It's Thurlby Amos Colyer, born the 31st of October 1918 in Shade Gap, Pennsylvania. I got a job cutting down trees when I was seventeen; I stacked lumber when I was eighteen, and I went out to Cleveland, Ohio and got a job in the aluminum factory out there making Allison heads for fighter planes. I got my induction papers for the 19th of August, and I took my greetings from the government in there and they said, "Another man to be deferred," and I said, "Not me, I'm going to get my year over with."

MR: This was in 1941?
TAC: Yes. Then I went back to Pennsylvania and worked in the sawmills, stacking lumber and cutting down trees, and then I went up to Russia, New York to my brother's house, stayed all night and went to Churchville and they signed me up with the Army there. I went to Niagara Falls and we did some training and learned to march, and then we picked peaches. Columns of two would line up out in front of the barracks there and a farmer would come along in a pick-up truck and want four or five and they'd just count them off; and vans would come along and pick up so many. When the peaches were done we went to picking prunes, and then when that was done we went to picking apples. And then we got on a train and went to Camp Wheeler, Georgia and I was hitchhiking from Macon, Georgia to Dublin and Mr. Dixon picked me up and it came over the air that Pearl Harbor… I was on my way back, Sunday morning, and they said that the Japs had attacked Pearl Harbor. He told me that he had just gotten a letter from his son a couple of weeks before and he had landed in the Philippines. We took our basic training down there and we set up machine guns around the place in case the Japs were coming over. Then we went to Ford Ord and drilled and marched and then we went to Hawaii–over to Honolulu.

MR: Did you go on any of the maneuvers in the South?
TAC: No, no, we did a lot of marching, but the maneuvers were all done by that time. Then we went over to Hawaii to guard the islands over there. We were the first outfit out, the 27th, and we went over and were on the beaches and they

brought a ship load of lumber over there. I was the only hillbilly there that knew how to stack lumber so I took over the stacking of the lumber and they made a Corporal out of me. Then we cut down trees–ten feet long and eight-ten inches in diameter–and we set them like posts all over the parking areas and parks so the Japs couldn't land. Someone had put the pillboxes in by the runway and they put them in too high and there was no bottom in them; there was just a steel thing. It looked like a box with no top on it turned upside down. Gottfried and I had… They sent a platoon out to lower them down eight inches and there were only two that weren't city guys so they brought us two, and the two of us went down in and dug out underneath and then the guys would push it down and when it was all done, there was only two of us that worked; the rest of them played cards. But Gottfried and I both liked to work. So the Lieutenant said he would like to give us a three day pass, but he couldn't, so he gave us three 24 hour passes. Then when we cut down the trees… I found out early on if you wanted to go to Honolulu or wanted to go on pass, you went alone and you kept your shoes shined and your clothes all neat and no whiskers and the MPs never bothered you. To get out of there you had to have your dog tags on. I never had anything on my body but a belt. I would take my dog tags and stick them in there [points to his chest]–put the thing in and let it stick out and that would get me by the inspection and then when I got down close to the guards, I would hitchhike with a command car–mostly I'd like to get a command car but I couldn't get a jeep and they passed me right on through. Coming back then, I would get anybody–anybody that could drive that could pick me up. If nobody would pick me up, I'd watch for a truck that was coming back from recreation for the guys. I'd take my necktie off and [unclear] down, and they'd take me back into camp.

But when we cut down the trees, when that was done, they called me in and made a Sergeant out of me. And we were out in the jungle cutting down trees and the Sergeant would say, "Hey, Colyer, do this or do that." Then they made me Sergeant so then the next day I went out and he said, "Come and do this, Colyer," and I said, 'You do it Sarge, I'm a Sarge too." He said, "I don't know how the hell you're going to give orders; you never could take them." I thought I was good at it. So they put me… I had a 75 down on the beach and three guys went to sleep. I had six men on the bridge to blow the bridge to keep the Japs from going anywhere they wanted and six guys on the 75 down on the beach and they put on a triple alert. Then you had to have three on guard duty at one time. So the guys came to me and they said we don't get any sleep having to get up every two hours to go on duty. How about us standing guard–three of us will go on from seven to one, and then three will come on from one till seven, six hours each. Then we switched them–the ones that were on first would go on last. That put eleven hours in one day and one in the next day. I took the time down on the beach in the daytime to sleep but they caught them and court martialed them and I was of course the Sergeant so I was the number one witness. I didn't lie to them; I just didn't tell them the whole story. I let it go like they were doing fourteen hours a

day guard duty so they busted me down to a Private and turned them out of the guardhouse.

We were in Black Sand Beach and I was on ground patrol a lot there and it was on a big gun overlooking Kilo Harbor there and there was a real fancy cabin up on top of the cliff there and a big screened-in porch and that's where we slept. We didn't get into the rest of the place, but we slept in the screened-in place there and they brought us our meals three times a day. It was all bluff because we never had a shell for the gun but we were there every morning and every evening so that people could see us and that was good duty. It was a five inch gun taken off of the Arizona.

WC: Was there still a lot of evidence when you got there of the attack on Pearl Harbor? Could you see a lot of destruction?
TAC: Broken glass, windows broke out, shell holes in buildings from the machine guns…

MR: How long were you at Hawaii?
TAC: Must have been close to two years, a year and half to two years.

WC: When were you finally assigned to a tanker unit–the self-propelled gun?
TAC: I was trained on 81 mortars and machine guns and then there were three of us Sergeants that trained at the Hawaii department there, the guard in Ewa, Hawaii there and then Cannon Company came over. I said to the Captain that the Captain was to blame for the guys having too much guard duty, and he said I was–that I gave them too much guard duty. I'm a little bit on the stubborn side, so we argued a bit and he got tired of it, and Cannon Company came over and he put me in Cannon Company. Put two of us in and the one guy [unclear] until they took him back to where he had sat before and that saved my life. Because D Company I think was pretty near all killed on the 7th of July over there. I like to walk and I like to see things so I got a ten hour pass and I walked over to the mountain in Hawaii and I had nothing to drink and up on top of the mountain they had a little cabin up there and I was really thirsty and they had a barrel there to catch the rainwater from the roof there but it was full of little wigglies. I brushed them aside a little bit and had me a little bellyful of wiggly water and they had rolls of barbed wire in there–ten or twelve rolls of barbed wire in there, and I don't know what that was for. We marched up over there one night and about twelve o'clock they had us go to sleep anyplace and I went in and went and got those big banana leaves and I made a bed on top of these rolls of wire and I slept on top of the wire on the leaves, and the other guys slept out among the mosquitos.

When we were in Kakui it rained twenty days out of twenty-one, and I took off and went to Hilo and the Lieutenant wanted to know where I was at, and asked

where I was at and they said I went to the dentist. Well, the dentist wasn't open that day. When I got home, he was a little bit teed off, and he said, "You guys sharpen up a little," he said, "because we are going to need another Corporal one of these times." I was a Corporal at that time. We moved to Hilo. We were on guard duty and they took everybody off of guard duty and put them on a truck and took them to Hilo. And I had to walk but that's all they did about it. I was so tired towards the end of the thing; it was about a twenty mile hike down there after walking all day on guard duty. It was a column of twos so they kept me in the middle–they kept me walking in the middle so I wouldn't blunder off into a ditch. I got down into Hilo and I had a good friend in E Company, Anahar, and we were in the mess hall and I had my head down and somebody tapped me from the other side of the table and I said, "Where's Anahar?" I was talking to Anahar. I'm pretty sure he was one of the ones killed.

WC: Did you train on the self-propelled gun on Hawaii at all?
TAC: Yes. I was a couple of years older than anybody else in the outfit except the officers and I don't know how old they were but…

MR: You were what–about twenty-three or twenty-four?
TAC: I think twenty-one. Because I was gone forty-six months. Never saw anybody I knew in forty-six months. Never had a furlough.

MR: Did you do any practice on landings and so on while you were in Hawaii, beach landings and so on?
TAC: Yes, we went over and landed on Maui. We went a couple of places. And the one day we went in the tank, in the Higgins boat, and every once in while a wave would come along over the top. And we had a Mae West that you put around and tightened up a little cylinder and when that water was coming over the top, I kept that screwed up pretty near tight ready to give her a little more if too much came over the top. Because there were times that the waves were so rough you couldn't see the boats next to you. They'd be down in, when you were down in. We were at Barbers Point for quite a while and two guys didn't go to sleep–they ran off to Honolulu and I was up in the mountain. That was the day I took the big walk up on the mountain. Lieutenant O'Toole was a real Army man and I was the only hillbilly–we had three or four or five rebels in there from down south there but at the time I was the only one from Pennsylvania and I was in a New York outfit and that was how I got to be a Corporal; part of it because he was pushing me a little. But when the guys went to sleep they picked out three Sergeants to go and bring them back, walking, and they were supposed to each have seven miles. I got back there and here the guy had played off sick and went to the doctor, so when I got back they picked me. He said, "Make sure they don't get away from you." I said, "What can I do if they run?" He said, "If you're afraid to go, I'll send somebody else." I said, "No, I'm not afraid to go, but I'd like to know the rules before I do go." So, they threatened to break my legs and little

things like that. Cars would stop on Sunday and offer to pick us up, and I said, "No, we are walking for our health," and kept on walking. We got back home–to camp–and they put the two of them digging the big hole, and one of them dug a little bit and he said, hell, he wasn't digging anymore and he didn't. The other guy kept digging but I think they both got the same out of it.

I went one day without permission to Honolulu and when I got back the outfit had moved out, moved another twenty miles. But the guys had thrown everything I had on the truck and took it with them. And here were all strangers; I went to a place with all strangers. And the Lieutenant said, "Have the two guys do this." They were just moving in. And I said, "You and you get over and do this." Then I went right out of the tent and kept on going. Never looked back.

MR: Did you live in tents when you were in Hawaii?
TAC: When we first went there we lived in a schoolhouse, and it was one big room and it was solid beds with a path about that wide [indicates about a foot wide with hands] here and there, and you would have your badge bag under your bed and you had to stand on the other beds and pick it up and get your stuff out of there. And we ate C-Rations left over from World War I. You got a can of meat and beans–everybody could eat them–but the hash was a little on the sad side and the stew, I think it was stew, and one can of dog biscuits. You got the four cans in the morning and you were done for the day. The next morning you'd do the same thing again. We moved to Hilo and then we moved back up to Schofield Barracks and we took a hike one night over the [unclear] and our radio wave was lost and I heard them tell the guy–the other radio man, "The mountain is at my back and I'm under the Big Dipper." [laughs] I thought we were pretty well all under the Big Dipper. We took a walk one day and walked clear up over the mountain where I had gone, except the whole army went that time. It got about twelve o'clock and they said "Fall out and go to sleep," and we were in a guava patch, field, those with little short thorns. When we came down off of that the next morning, there was a truck sitting there with those thirty gallon pots that they used in there and we had French toast and I tell you down towards the end of them there were little thin ones. The thirty gallon[unclear]

MR: After you left Hawaii, where did you go?
TAC: Right straight to Saipan. We were on a big ship when we went in there and there were Japs, a lot of dead Japs swimming there, so we must have been out quite a little ways because they said the reef was high and there were dead ones and some that were riding on something and they'd crawl off and just have their nose above water. We'd just laugh at them and went on through. It was right down over the hill from Aslito Airport there and the first night I heard an airplane coming and I was standing with a 50 caliber straight up and I'm standing up on the cannon holding on to the 50 caliber and this airplane came across and turned right above me and took off down the beach strafing. So I had a good chance to

shoot a Zero down and it left us. The next morning we got up and walked out around the hill and up into Aslito Airport, and there were dead Japs all over the place and we watched a dogfight up there with about eight or ten of each. One of them–you'd see them smoking and heading for ocean. One guy came down and he was going to land right in front of us–just outside of the airport, just had to get over a fence row there into Aslito Airport and somebody took a shot at him. He just got up enough to clear there–he was smoking [unclear]. Down into the airport [unclear], Marines all around him, and he said, "I thought the Imperial Forces owned this or I'd have landed at sea." So it went on through the airport there. There weren't many names of things–Napatan there, that was quite a big chunk of land and it was just a little past Aslito Airport and a little bit to the east of it, I guess. Old Howlin' Mad–they went through there but they left an awful lot of them; he was in such a hurry. The Marines had to hurry because Howlin' Mad sat out there on the ship and had a map and he looked at the map and he decided how far the men had to go that day. And they gave the Marines the flat country where they could use tanks and anything they wanted and gave the 27th Division those hills where they'd be coming up and down. The Marines could have walked backwards faster than they could have gone through the hills there–woods and cliffs, and steep ones.

MR: How did you feel about Howlin' Mad Smith?
TAC: I'd like to have him shot. Anytime there was a big fight the men didn't have time to fight. I think he was sitting out on the ship. They didn't have time to clean them out because the Suicide Gulf was there–they couldn't go in there with tanks. The day before the big banzai attack there, they were fighting there that day. I imagine Howlin' Mad Smith saying, "Move faster, move faster."

MR: So you're saying he left pockets of Japanese as they moved through?
TAC: Yes, I got hit three times after the island was secure. Well they told us that the Marines would fight their way across the island and fight their way back to the ship and leave. And that's about what they did. It said in the paper there they killed 1900 after the island was secure. Because we went up on Napatan–I don't know for sure where it was–except it was right close to the airport there. The four M8s in the 105th there–the self-propelled guns–we were put about forty feet apart across where the big boulders and trees were. We tried to get through them one day and I had a couple of guys go with us for a little ways but when we got a little ways, there wasn't room to get the M8s through there. We backed up and went around the other way, but they said that they thought there were about 500 there. Smith thought there were about 500 there and Old Howlin' Mad said there wasn't over 200. When they counted up the dead after they went over the island one time, they found 1250 bodies there. The newspaper–they were all on Howlin' Mad Smith's side. That one newsman said that the 27th Division was held up by a few Japs in a cave–a few Japs in a cave could have been 150 Japs. We went up there–there were about 200 of us going through pretty near the middle of the

island or someplace. There was a couple of hundred of us going through a field and we went down over a hill into a little valley and there was a mound of dirt down there and a hole like a woodchuck hole on each side of it and they threw the satchel charge in there, one of our soldiers. A Jap ran out the other side and down the gully and there were about fifty men up on the hill shooting at him and they threw another one in and another Jap ran out through there and then about every two seconds there was a Jap running across the foot of the cliff there, and had a guy shooting at him, and when he got to the other side another one would run or if he didn't make it, another one would take off. Here I am in this spot–the whole wall was brown with Japanese–they were climbing out of there, getting out of there because they could see all these soldiers coming through the field, so I dropped one of those 15 pound projectiles right in the middle of them in the stone wall there. I don't know–forty-fifty came rolling down off of there. Then the Americans had something to shoot at. Then we moved on and we went about fifty yards past the end of the gully there and the Lieutenant said he thought that there was a Jap underneath in a foxhole that we ran over and held a hand grenade up against the bottom of the tank and knocked one motor out. Then it wouldn't back up–one motor wouldn't pull it in reverse–and there were too many Japs down the hill over to the left and we didn't want to go ahead any further with the thing that wasn't working and the Lieutenant towed us back out of there.

MR: Now was that that drawing, or did that happen at another time?
TAC: That was sometime, that's what it was.

MR: Could you hold that up and tell us about that drawing?
TAC: [holds up pencil drawing of tank] That's got the 50 caliber standing up there in the middle. They cut the track in two in three places. On the 6th of July we got a call–they had a ditch four feet deep and six feet wide clear across the island and just had a wooden bridge at each end of it. We were at the end of the ditch on the 6th and the Lieutenant got a call that there was man up on Suicide Gulch there–and that wasn't the name; there weren't any names at that time. But I think that was the day that the Generals committed suicide in there and sixty soldiers shot themselves too. We went up and got him out of there. The Lieutenant always put the radio man out and the loader, and he just took me and the driver, so then the three of us would go in where we had to get a man out, and so we went up around the hill and here we picked this guy up and he said, "There's something big going on here; there's really something big happening because the Japs are running back and forth down there carrying boxes and I've been shooting them all day and they don't even bother with me." He said, "They've got tanks down there and there are hundreds of Japs in that gully," and he said he saw a boogie wheel–you know what a boogie wheel is, it's a little wheel that helps keep the track line. He said, "I saw a boogie wheel shining through the camouflage stuff on it and I shot at it and then they shot the boulder out back up

with a 37 millimeter. "They turned that around," he said, "and shot my boulder down that was hardly big enough to hide back of." And he was kind of shell shocked a little, but we came back down off that hill and I told the Captain of the Army that's on the front line there, I told him just what I'd been told up there–there were hundreds of Japs down there and they had tanks. What you will never find anyplace–all I've read about it, they won't say what time of day that Old Howlin' Mad had them move out, and it was four o'clock in the afternoon, and you'll never hear this again. Four o'clock in the evening when I was talking to him, I told him about it and he said, "Oh, there goes the Colonel; he'd like to hear about this." And somebody said, "Get going as fast as you can go down the beach." And they took off; everybody took off–we went with them–and at dark they stopped and they were all set up waiting for Japs and they came out of their foxholes at dark. They didn't know there was anybody coming. Our Lieutenant took us back over the ditch and the Japs came right down the other side of the ditch where we were before when they killed all those people. We were stuck in the ditch. We got up the next morning and there were bullets flying every place, and we stayed in the coconut grove place there that had all mines in it at one time but it was cleaned out. The Lieutenant took us back over the ditch and the next morning at daylight I saw all these Japs coming over the top of the hill from Paradise Valley. They say in the paper there that they came down the valley and they came down off of the hill, a whole swarm of them. We were told at the time that there were 4400 of them. Now Howlin' Mad Smith says there were 300 of them and they walked right through the 27th Division without anybody firing a shot. Well there wasn't anybody there because he had moved everybody to the other end of the… Moved them 500 yards. Some said 500 and some said twelve, but I'm guessing it was closer to 500 yards that they ran as fast as they could. Then it was dark and I imagine everybody just lay down and the next morning they didn't have to break through the two battalions of 105 because there was nobody there. That's why there was no noise. They claim that there was something that the Japs were doing and I didn't hear a thing. While we were there stuck in the ditch, a Jap tank went through the little field and through the little woods and I watched him go and then the Lieutenant finally towed us out of there and we went down and went across to come up the other way because the road was blocked and tanks were all sitting out there–I don't know what they put across the road to keep the tanks from going in. We went up the other side and we stopped to tell them that they were lying along the road–the 106th regiment. I said, "Why don't you go in? All of those men are being killed in the 105th." The guy said, "Oh we're tired." Well, it's five o'clock in the morning; what would you be tired of, and while I was talking to him that Jap got loose and shot the track in two and three places and shot the 50 caliber off of there. One bullet–the metal's about two and one half inches around the turret–it went halfway through that and glanced off and it was right at my ear. If it had come through, I would've had a bigger hole in my head than I have.

MR: So you were wounded at that time?
TAC: No. I was wounded in an [unclear] where the post, the big boulders were there. It was like a graveyard except they were big and some like a big refrigerator and some as big as a car. We went around that and three Japs ran into the back of a cement wall or something in there, and I shot at the middleman and a bullet hit the top of the machine gun–they were shooting at us with machine guns, rifles. One of those bullets hit something sharp and a chunk of lead came off and went through that eyebrow, [points to left eyebrow] right in the corner. I said to my Sergeant, "That there just felt like a 22 bullet or a bullet in the skin there–no blood." Just the eyebrow dropped right down on my cheek there, in a matter of a couple of seconds. I had quite a headache. But, I said to the Sergeant, "Hey, it just felt like a bullet." I said, "Sergeant, cut this out of here." He said, "No, no, no." And the driver said, "I thought you had lead in your ass the way you went down." And then we stayed there and fought till dark with this lying down here [points to left cheek] and then they ran me down to the Aslito Airport there and we stayed the night in a Japanese hangar there and the next morning then we went on down to the hospital. The piece of lead just stuck in and stuck out. Fifty years later I went down to the Veterans Hospital and they x-rayed my head and they said, "Nothing's wrong with the head, but there's bone chips in back of your left eye floating around in there." So I talked my way out of there in two days–out of the hospital. The doctor said, "You're the only man that wants out of here. We have some here that should be gone, but they don't want to go." And I was a little worried–I took off… I was walking down the street in front of the barracks and I met a doctor coming up and taking a bath up there–the tank there the Japs used for taking showers. He was just traveling with the towel around him. I said, "When are you going to fix me up, Doc?" and he stooped down and picked up my eyebrow and said, "I'll get at you in about thirty days." I said, "I can't stay thirty days; those other gunners are young fellows and freeze up with a gun. I have to get out of here." Well, the next morning they let me out and I started walking through the road through a sugar cane field and it was scary as hell with no gun or anything and the Japs–we'd been chasing them around through the sugar cane. We were down off of the hill among the sugar cane. That ditch–I had a picture of it in the book here. We got out to where we stopped there and all the soldiers stopped, and up on the ridge I blew up an ammunition dump up there. It was up in that area that they came down through there. I don't believe there was a man down there to fight with them. Howlin' Mad Smith said there weren't enough Japs there to leave; they had I believe four battalions that were afraid to move around down there[unclear]. It was a good place to hide; you couldn't get in with equipment to fight with and Howlin' Mad Smith said that one battalion was enough. Four couldn't handle them, so he took three of them off and left four behind and we were with them. And while I was in the hospital Howlin' Mad Smith said that 500 Japs had walked right through the 27th Division there and the Marines had to run them down and kill them before daylight. And when I got out of the hospital they told me that the Japs had got in

a column of twos and came up through the same place we figured they'd come out because they had cover right up to the end of it. Quite a little bit of it was open and they went around that. They came to us–one soldier standing there probably four or five feet away from them, and they gave them the password, and they were dressed in American uniforms and helmets and it was just moonlight enough to see that they had the little cloth hats on in the middle and that they were Japanese. He just passed them on through and there were 120 of them. They went to the Aslito Airport–it was close there–they ran in and out of airplanes and they blew up one airplane and damaged a couple of them. But there were only 120 of them instead of either the 300 or 500 that Howlin' Mad Smith said. Now everything was big–way out of proportion–if it was Marines, but the Army, they couldn't even fight one man, and if you read some of these things the Army really didn't…

MR: So you think that the Marines got a lot more credit than they should have?
TAC: A lot more. I don't think old Marshall was very sensible either to think that a man could be relieved because he was trying to keep down casualties and they made up all kind of stories. But we went down to–there were cliffs quite a ways around the place and we were up on top of the cliffs there and the Japs would run out of a hole and run around a ways and run back in there and I would shoot when they got around–I'd shoot into the ground right around as close to the corner as I could thinking the shrapnel would get them. The one guy comes out there and I'm all set for him and he walked out and just kept walking, and everybody's yelling, "Shoot, shoot, shoot," so I finally shot and hit him fair with a three inch gun so he was scattered pretty well. They would come out at night and dig sweet potatoes; they sucked on sugar cane. They had no water to speak of and so we watched them come out in the field and I said, "I'm going to shoot them." So I got ready to shoot, and then I saw something white and I said, "I'm not going to shoot." Nobody had told me to shoot, so I said, "I'm not going to shoot because that might be women and children and old people out there trying to get something to eat." I didn't know there were any civilians were there. I thought it was a Japanese island and everybody was Japanese. I only saw an old grandmother and two little boys and Colonel Jensen was carrying three dishes to them to give them to eat and they had just brought them in from the caves there.

MR: How long were you on Saipan?
TAC: Eight weeks. Well, from the 16th of June till the 4th of August. The Lieutenant got a call one day that they were shooting Japs off of the jeeps when they went by the hill. We went down and it's a hundred yards up to the cliff where they were at, and the Sergeant said, "Drive up in there." I said, "Sarge, I can shoot eight miles; why do we have to go right up to them?" So we stopped right there and then I got a chunk of lead in my chest and I had no shirt on–my first day off in Saipan–and I just grabbed it like that [puts one hand over another on his chest] and I looked down in the [unclear] and saw blood running out

through my fingers. The Sergeant said, "We'll take you back in the tank." I said, "No, I'm going in the jeep." I got down off of the cannon and I was feeling good and all of a sudden, down I went. So they carried me out of there and went down to the hospital and I think they used a dull butcher knife to clean out around–that's the way it felt–and sewed it up with a binder twine. But I had a lot of trouble with it for about a year after that; the muscles had to pull to make up the difference in it. There's quite a hole in there.

MR: How long were you hospitalized for that?
TAC: I don't really know, but they held up a ship for a little while. The 106th infantry was moving down to Espiritu Santo in the…

MR: So you were wounded two times on Saipan?
TAC: Well, one day the Lieutenant got a call that there was a Jap up on the ridge shooting people and we took off and it was quite a little ways, and while we were there the Japs cut loose and shot two or three rounds in the cross roads right fifty yards away from us. Everybody ran under my cannon that could get under there. And I was melting up some chocolate and I had taken some Pet milk along, and I was going to have some chocolate. So I was sitting there on the cans, stirring my chocolate and these shells dropped in the crossroad, but I could see when I first got in there that there were no Japs watching. I said, "I'll bet they zeroed in on this crossroad hoping to hit somebody coming through there." But they thought I was the bravest man around because I just sat there and stirred my chocolate while they're all hiding. And then we took off and went up the road, came to a fork in the road, and we took the left road and went about 100 yards. The Lieutenant decided we were on the wrong road and we pulled off and turned around. Four jeeps came along and three of them had been shot through the shoulder. They sat on the one spot on the back of the jeep and on that one spot–one seat–each one of them had been shot through the shoulder. And when we got back to the crossroads there was a man sitting there in the road, and he had been shot in the shoulder–the same place. So that Jap shot the four of them and the one fell off and he said, "Help, help," and the Sergeant said, "We'll have to help him; we'll have to pick him up." I said, "He can get over there in back of that old truck that's sitting over there. He's waiting for us–somebody to stop here." We took the other fork and went out. Another fork in the road, and I said–I always liked to know where I was going when you were in Japanese territory. I was looking through a periscope, and I was going to look over the top of the tanks so I didn't pull it down much, but I tried to pull it down over my ears. And I looked over the top and I said, "Up over the hill, pilot," and pilot said, "Up over the hill," to Cicero, the driver. About that time a bullet came right off the hill there and it must have just cleared my head and took the top of his head off, a hole about like that in his head. [makes a circle with thumb and forefinger] And it was just like dumping water out of a boot when he went down to the bottom of that tank, down, right down between his knees, his head went. I grabbed–those

had deep pockets–and I grabbed a handkerchief out of there that was dirty and threw it away, and then I grabbed a clean one and it was folded up and I laid it over his head and I held it a half an hour to forty five minutes trying to… You can't do anything, but you try to do something, so I held his head. The Japs had, I don't know how many bullets in there, and they're going around–zip, zip, zip–like marbles in a tub and when they hit a certain spot I got a little chunk of lead in along my backbone and they put, I don't know, four or five pieces of lead in there. I was scared more about it than anything because I was sure I was bleeding to death because I couldn't see it. But he lived four hours. The next tank–there was a Tech Sergeant there that had never been up to the front; he went along for the ride. And that bastard shot him through the shoulder and he died in just a few seconds–cut an artery off there.

Lieutenant [unclear], so Lieutenant figured he had two guns–one shooting at this fork and one at this fork up on the hill–and the driver said, "They're trying to get him on the radio," and they can't get the guy on the radio and I said, "Hit him, hit him, if you ram the tank into the hill, the tank [unclear] you'll get his attention." That old turret turns around to see what's going on. So we got him. Then we went up to the top of the hill and there was a guy lying out in the fields as bait. The Lieutenant said, "Go back–take the two guys back down to the medic." It's scary when you see what happens the first time through and he's still waiting up there. So we went back and then the Lieutenant came along and he shot at him and he seemed to do most of the shooting. I tell you he was… We had one in the gully there; they called and it was just pretty near dark and they couldn't get this fellow out and they called us and we went in and I don't know for sure but I think we were in Suicide Gully, and the Japs just didn't want to do anything because it was a couple of days before they did their [unclear] on the big banzai attack. The Lieutenant crawled out of his cannon and went over into the woods and was calling and the guy finally answered him and he threw him over his shoulder and brought him out and put him on his tank.

MR: So you were wounded three times on Saipan?
TAC: Yes.

MR: You said you went to Espiritu Santo?
TAC: New Hebrides–Espiritu Santo–it's the big island down there.

MR: Did you have much time in the hospital with those three wounds?
TAC: No. A couple of days with the eye and they put a patch over it. And then I talked my way out and the guy gathering up the dead soldiers picked me up and took me back to the front. And then that night it was moonlight and they said, "Hey Colyer, that's a good target," and I took it off and threw it away and never had any trouble with it. About a year later it worked out; it went in back of my

eye and I told them to take it out of the same hole it came in, so you can hardly see the scar on the thing. But I had a long time healing up with the chest.

We went up through the gully–I think it's the same gully–and we stopped among the dead people there and there was a guy forty feet away probably, and his hand went up like that–real slow–and then he would let it fall, and after a little bit, up would go that hand again trying to draw attention. I told my Sergeant, I said, "Hey there's a man over there that's wounded," and he said, "No, everybody's dead," and not this fellow and so he sent a guy over and I don't know whether he died or not but he'd been shot in the head. And then we were back up through another time and there were cliffs on this side and on this side there were just trees mostly, and I said, "Boy that looks dangerous–the cliff side." So there were six-seven guys walking in back of us–soldiers–and I said, "You better come up along the side here because that looks pretty dangerous over there," so they came right up along the side and didn't get stopped anymore when one of them got shot through the heart from the other side and they dragged him up over there and put him in my cannon and I checked him and I said, "He's dead." The Sergeant said, "We haven't got room for any dead; we're going to take him." I said, "I don't know whether he's dead or not. I'm no doctor." So we took him with us back. I didn't know without much going on around there how soon he'd be picked up.

MR: Now were you involved in Okinawa also?
TAC: Their artillery scared the devil out of me there. All we did in New Hebrides, of course, was march. Two guys went fishing with dynamite and caps, and smokers. I never smoked and I never picked up any cigarette butts. When the Sergeant would say, "You go down through here and I don't want to see a cigarette butt left lying," and I'd go in back of the tents where there weren't any because I hated cigarettes and they were smokers. I wished on the way over–there were 5,000 of us on that ship going over and I was in the fourth bunk–and I said, "Man, I wish I'd throw one of these bastards overboard so the rest of them would quit smoking."

MR: How long were you on Okinawa?
TAC: Probably two months and I was out on the ship when the suicide guys came over and in the middle of the night, you'd hear them yell, "For god's sake, make smoke, make smoke."[laughs] That's the only way they could keep them off.

MR: Did you see any of the ships get hit?
TAC: Not while I was there–not that I know of. I spent two nights there and then I came home. We would fight in the daytime. The Lieutenant did the same thing. They would move the company into a place and then they'd leave the inmates out until just about dark and bring them in. Then he had me go out and guide them in and one day he took just me and the driver and we went up on a

big long place on Okinawa. And we went up and there were no roads to speak of there either. We were going along this flat road along the side of a hill. It was flat on the right hand side of the road, and we went along and here a jeep or something had been blown up at a mine on one track on the left, and the other side of the track there was nothing wrong. It was nice, smooth going and [unclear] the driver–it was pretty [unclear] along the other side–he slid along the side there with that M8 and then back up on the road when he got by that hole, and a jeep came along after we passed it in fifty feet or so and drove over that and it flew up in the air about fifteen feet. We went on out and up. I don't know where he was going or what he was going for, but we kept going and finally it started to rain. And I bet you that they were about ready to zero in on us when we took off out of there. It poured and poured and we were clear down out of there before it stopped raining. And we got back to where we had the hole dug; we dug a hole for three of us. The Lieutenant said, "Make it a little wider and I'll sleep with you." It was good to have the Lieutenant because he had an extra blanket with him. We came back with no top over the cannon and we were soaked and there were four inches of water all over this here six by eight hole that we had there, and so I dug a hole in one end and bailed a little water out and then the hole held what was left. Then we took ammunition crates four inches thick and three feet long or something like that and put a floor down in there, and we were all ready to go to bed and I had a dry blanket so I took every stitch off and about twelve o'clock heard, "Halt, bang." Here Nelson had halted somebody and the Lieutenant–he ran out and threw two hand grenades and the tank driver says, "Get up, the Japs are here." I said, "I don't have any pants on." The next morning we found a young lady there probably eighteen-nineteen years old–Okinawa girl–and the side of her face blown off and one leg chewed up where the hand grenade hit her. They would get chased out of their house in the daytime and then they'd try to find their way back at night. They were making Nelson out a hero, but he wasn't feeling good at all because in the first place, he had shot her.

So we did a lot of exercise in there and they sent me out early with the–they had to hold the ship up; nobody said how long they held up the 106th regiment's ship there and they were going on to New Hebrides–but here I was the only one on there and we crossed the equator and they had some real tricks that they pulled on the guys there. I had this big patch on my chest here so I didn't have to go through the Tube. They said, "You sweep the deck," and so I started sweeping the deck and the guy said, "You dumb son-of-a-bitch, don't you even know how to use a broom?" And I had to turn it upside down and sweep with the handle. Anything was better than going through that Tube there. But then they put me in charge of putting in the streets for the new Cannon Company and we had a big guy there about six foot six and a real nice Michigan farmer, and I weighed 140-45 pounds and I'd go by his tent and he'd be lying in there on the bed and I'd bounce in there like I weighed 300 pounds and I'd say, "Waginkie, I'm going to

drag you out of there," and he'd say, "Haw, haw, haw." They went fishing with their dynamite and then the guy smoking had a cigarette in his mouth and it went across the caps; one little spark fell down in there and blew it up. One of them was blind, I don't know whether the other one was or not. In the hospital, I was a little full of the devil and I jumped into two guys for a wrestling match there and they tore one shoulder off a joint and I went to the hospital thirty miles away. They were about ready for me to come back home and there was a guy sitting with no shirt on–nobody had shirts on–on the bed next to me and I reached over and gave him a right to the ribs and a left and he jumped out of the way and the shoulder jumped off. It would jump off and the ball would sit up on the edge of the socket so the arm would stick out like that. [sticks left arm out straight] The doctor said, "I don't know what we're going to do with you Colyer." He said, "You can't keep that on; I guess we'll put you in limited service." I said, "What's that?" He said, "You'll probably be in the PX for the rest of the war." I had a pretty good taste of war on Saipan, but I said, "I want to fight or go home." I don't want my grandchildren to say, "What did you do?" and I'd have to tell them that I was in the PX all the time. I didn't have to go in the first place and then the shoulder was going to get me out. We did maneuvers on New Hebrides. I was a walker–still am when I can–but my walking days are about over.

MR: After you left Okinawa where did you go?
TAC: Shade Gap. I came back to Fort Dix. Oh, on Okinawa we'd be doing things during the day, but at night there were only a few soldiers left and Sugar Loaf Hill–we'd go up there every night and sit in the foxholes and it scared the devil out of me, the big shells that came across there. We went one time in the daytime and we came to an overhang–a cliff that was overhang–almost from here to the corner and it started out about two feet high and got to about seven or eight feet high. About fifteen or twenty of us went in there at night and they had the big shell that was a fifteen inch deal and they'd shoot it and you didn't seem to hear it until it got by the end of where the stone wall was, and once it got by there–it sounded like a freight train going by and you'd follow it with your eyes just like you'd see it. Just about all or a lot of them you'd sit there and watch them with your eyes. I was watching and there was a little stick stuck down from the roof–just a little thing–and when I'd turned my head it would run. I was just sure that it was a Jap and then I figured out it was that stick sticking down there. And the Lieutenant on Saipan, when he was in getting the guy out in the night there when it was dark–every time I looked there was a stump there that had little shoots on the side about a foot long and it just looked like the brush they put in their helmets, and when the Lieutenant came back I said, "Lieutenant, there's a Jap over there," and he said, "Well, shoot it." [laughs] I'm trying to think where else we saved somebody. I often wondered why, if he didn't care whether I got killed, or what it was, but I about figured out–I never was a young guy, I think I was born an old man, a lot of common sense, and I think that's what he was going on–that I'd be the best one to have with him in a pinch. But one time we came

out of the woods and there were seven guys there and the Lieutenant said, "Where's your outfit?" and he said, "This is it–seven guys left."

MR: You said you returned to Pennsylvania after you were discharged. Did you ever use the GI Bill?
TAC: No.

MR: How about the 52-20 Club?
TAC: I belong to it.

MR: Did you join any Veterans Organizations?
TAC: The American Legion, that's the only thing.

MR: How do you think your time in the service changed or had an effect on your life?
TAC: Oh, I think I came out pretty much what I went in. It didn't hurt me. I'm glad I went and the Veterans has really been good to me.

MR: Now you had sent us this photograph–if you just hold it like this, can you tell us when and where that was taken?
TAC: [holds up photograph of TAC in military uniform] That would be Honolulu in probably '42.

[Walks over to an easel holding papers and medals in a frame]
WC: Go ahead and explain the medals there in the frame.
TAC: My wife sent my discharge papers to Washington and that's what they sent me back and that's how much I know about it. I know that's for shooting. [points to badge]

MR: That's the Combat Infantry Badge.
TAC: That's the Purple Heart.
WC: Yes, with the three clusters on it.
MR: And your dog tags over there, I see.
WC: Overseas stripes.
TAC: I was overseas 39 months and 10 days. Never saw anybody I knew for 46 months. I probably would've been homesick but I was so tickled that the fighting was there instead of at home.

WC: Did you want to hold up that medal you received from Saipan?
MR: You received this too. [holds up medal and certificate]
TAC: Why don't you read that into it?
WC: The Certificate says, "On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Battles of Saipan and Tinian, this certificate is presented to Thurlby Amos Colyer in honor of your heroism and dedication during the Second World War. Your

service to the people of the Pacific Islands and in honor of the memories of those who made the ultimate sacrifice for the cause of freedom, we appreciate your valor, courage and sacrifice to the islands upon which history was written. Given this thirtieth day of June 2005.

TAC: Thank you.
WC: Thank you.
MR: Thank you.