Mr. Paul Elisha
Veteran

LTC Robert von Hasseln
Interviewer

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Summary: Mr. Paul Elisha was a soldier in World War II who served as an Army radio operator. He took part in amphibious landings on Attu, Kiska, Makin, Kwajalein, Aitape, Leyte, Luzon, and Okinawa. He discusses his personal observations of several key historical figures from that war including General Douglas MacArthur, Marine General Holland M. Smith, Marine Raiders LTCs Evans Carlson and James Roosevelt (son of the President), and war correspondent Ernie Pyle.

This is the first of three interviews conducted by the New York State Military Museum

Tape One begins

E: That landing at Makin, that was the first landing where we used rubberized material for our radios. In the Aleutians, we literally took ponchos, wrapped it up to bring it ashore. For the landings in the Gilberts and the Marshalls, we got the rubberized stuff to put around the equipment. I was carrying, what do they call them, a '284' (radio). You know they misjudged the tides both at Tarawa and Makin Island.

Skips to Tape Two

E: We had to wade in, almost a hundred yards, we got to within fifty yards of shore, there were little jetties out there (Paul gestures with his arms out right and left with fingers pointing in a crossfire)and the Japanese had placed machine guns, and they had a field of crossfire, and they were just whipping it back and forth. I stepped in a hole(shellhole), they bombarded the hell out of it before we came, and I went down, but the guys on both sides of me got hit. But the radio, floated! You know, in the bag. So I just grabbed a hold of that radio and kicked and pushed, and got closer in and got up and ran for shore. So I would say the equipment in that case worked pretty well.

VH: Here's what we will do. Let's finish up on this form afterward. (Why were the joint assault signal companies formed?)

E: We were literally formed for a purpose. After Carlson's Raiders landed on Makin, that operation told them that for amphibious stuff (amphibious operations) you needed communications. So they picked a company strength unit and they took us out to Camp Pendleton, California. I was one of six radio operators assigned to that, and they put us through a month and a half of training with Carlson's guys. At Camp Pendleton, we prepared for amphibious stuff. And then we became the 75th Joint Assault Signal Company- JASCO. That was the first JASCO ever formed. And the idea was we were going to do a quick thing, go out to the Aleutians, come back and train all the other JASCOs. It never happened (laughing)! We got going and kept going across (the Pacific).

VH: Let's back up for a minute. Time is now 1430 on 12 December, interview of Mr. Paul Elisha by LTC Robert von Hasseln.

VH: Paul back up. When did you enter service?

E: September 24, 1942.

VH: What were you doing at the time, before the service?

E: I was going to school at night, at the junior college, studying journalism, and working in the daytime at the Signal Corps Radar Laboratories. It was an adjunct of Fort Monmouth. I was a procurement person. They were working on a lot of hot projects for the war, and I was a telephone emergency procurement person. They would give you a list of suppliers, and a list of what they needed. You would call three of them that met the specs, then get the bids, and the low bidder and the guy who could deliver it fastest got the contract. Then you just fill out the form and go on to the next one. I was doing that because I was underage, wanted to join right after Pearl Harbor, but my parents would not let me. As soon as I was able to convince my father, the following September, he signed the papers, and I enlisted. The nearest place I could enlist at the time was Fort Dix, so I went down there and enlisted, and thought I could get back (stationed at) to Fort Monmouth, that was for Signal Corps, but I ended up at Camp Crowder Missouri (laughing). We were the cadre, the first basic trainees at Camp Crowder.

VH: Did you have to build the post?

E: Yes, we did a lot of work, we lived in tents for the whole training period. A lot of mud.

VH: What was basic training like?

E: I would say it was on par with other soldiers at the time, but it was nothing like the training I got later at Camp Pendleton with the Marines. It was a quick thing, six weeks, or eight weeks, I forget which. Close order drill, hikes, lots of pushups, KP, other things like that. Some work details on the camp itself. And you got tested for various things so they could decide where they were going to send you. I was lucky because when I joined, early in the war, you could still ask for a branch of service. So when I asked for Signal Corps, they gave me a number of tests. I

was also a musician. I played the violin and the drums. And typical of the Army, aha, musician with good rhythm, good hearing, we'll make him a radio operator. So they sent me to a civilian radio school, Coyne radio school in Chicago, which had been taken over by the military. We lived in a hotel, and I went to radio school, and (courses in) electronics, technology, and code. I was rated when I graduated as a high speed radio operator. From the day I joined my unit I don't think we ever used code. We always used voice(laughing)! It just wasn't feasible in the field.

VH: How long were you in Chicago?

E: I believe through Christmas. January we were graduated, and in December we were visited by a large group of high level people, brass. They came through school, watched us at work. We were told they would be giving exams, and that those getting the highest scores would be getting a wonderful surprise. The rumors were rife of course: The Army was going to build, on top of the Mark, in San Francisco, a world-wide propaganda station. And we were going to man it. I studied very hard, and I think of the top ten, I came in fifth or sixth in the class. I was immediately assigned to this great surprise. As a going away present, we received first class Pullman accommodations to the west coast rather than a troop train. I remember a sergeant saying, 'I don't know about this. If they are giving us this it must be pretty awful (laughs)." And it turns out we were the cadre for the 75th Joint Assault Signal Company.

VH: so your next destination was Camp Pendleton?

E: No, it was Fort Ord, where we were formed. The company was mustered, got our officers, etc., then after several weeks, we loaded onto trucks and went on down to Camp Pendleton, where we began our training.

VH: Did they tell you anything about your mission at that time?

E: No, not a word, We were amazed when we saw what we were about to do, because these guys were typical of the Raiders, at that time: shaved heads, daggers at the hip. They were nothing like the spit-and-polish Marines and soldiers you saw, they were pretty special people and they acted like it. And we lived with them for the next six to eight weeks. They put us through training in hand-to-hand combat. You would go out to the end of a pier with full battle kit, and they would kick you off the pier into the water, and you would have to get to shore with everything on. They had guys in the water in case you didn't make it. As I recall, looking back, it was pretty rough stuff.

VH: Was everybody in the company Army Signal Corps?

E: No. The first guys in 75th JASCO had field artillery, air force, couple of navy people, and all the rest were related to the Signal Corps. The idea was that you had to cover all the bases. In an amphibious assault, the navy is your artillery, and the air force is your artillery, you have to handle the air strikes, the off-shore shelling, and all communications on the beach and back to

the ships. We would do that until the landing phase was secured, then they would pull us out and do the same thing somewhere else.

VH: You have all these navy types, and field artillery, it's a pretty unusual organization. And now suddenly you are being trained by Marine Raiders. You must have thought you were in for something?

E: The rumors were all over the place. For a while, somebody said they were going to send us to Guadalcanal. They were going to do a second landing on Guadalcanal. We had nothing to do with it. There was a lot of pressure to do something in the Pacific to raise the morale of the country. Since the Aleutians were the only piece of American territory that the Japanese had taken, it stood to reason that it would be great if we could take it back. I think that's why the strike was planned.

VH: What can you remember about training with marines at Camp Pendleton?

E: I remember the demeaning way which they looked upon the Army. I can understand why there is still a lot of antipathy among the services. They didn't think we were going to make it. They were told to train us and they did it. They kept saying 'You guys can't do this.' I think a lot of that was probably by design. Because, if you got angry enough, you could damn well do what they said you couldn't. A lot of us did exactly that. As I recall, there were a number of times they would put you through a lot. We had a lot of hikes on rugged terrain up and down the coast. Our graduation from that course, they landed us at some God-forsaken beach some distance from Camp Pendleton. We had to land, go inland to some particular spot, then make our way back, overland, cross-country, without being detected, to get back to a pickup point. You had to use any and all advantages you could create, scrape up, or whatever. Some us they had to out and get. I managed to get back. I was with a couple of guys who had come out of the CCCs (Civilian Conservation Corps). We had a number of labor men, wiremen, etc. who had come in from the CCC. Back in the late thirties before the war, if you got in trouble and had to see the judge, you could join the Army, join the CCC or go to jail. So some of these guys were pretty creative when it came to getting back to camp (laughing)! After Pendleton, we went back to Fort Ord. We did some maneuvers up and down the coast. Then we got on a ship, did some maneuvers, then moved by truck to San Francisco. We were loaded on some ships and went north. We stopped at Adak, I remember. We bivouacked on a tundra hillside for a couple days, and they gave us some equipment. We realized we were going into something. As usual there was a foul up. We were told it was only going to take a week or two. We went in May. The weather was miserable. We had field jackets, ordinary pants, and combat boots. We did not have heavy boots or anything else. As a result, there were a lot of guys who got bayonetted in their foxholes because they froze. They could not handle their weapons. The Japanese would come down at night and bayonet them in their foxholes, on Attu.

Actually, I landed with a group from the 7th Division, it was like a Ranger Company, and our job was to land in a cove on the other side of the island away from the main landings. We were to climb up this mountain, go over the top, and came down to a place where we could actually see what was below. I remember setting up the radio, and my buddy at the time, and tuning the radio to various frequencies, and picking up Radio Vladivostok, and hearing them play part of the 1812 Overture. And then the rest of the invasion landed, the main thrust, and then the Rangers, who we had accompanied, came down from the other side.

VH: So the night before the 7th Infantry landed on Attu, you are listening to Tchaikovsky on a radio. What did you think about your equipment? the radios?

E: It was very interesting. You know what I can remember about the first gripes about the equipment. During the last year and a half of the war, when production really got up to speed, and they were coming out with new things, and you had these Walkie-Talkies that you could depress the button to talk and listen. I can remember that they would go bad in a minute. But the 284s that we lugged in on our backs, which you worked with a hand crank generator, never broke down, always worked. It was the later equipment that wasn't as good.

VH: Those radios were kind of hard to operate?

E: Yes, they were not as precise as later equipment, but they were extremely rugged. They took tremendous amounts of punishment. I can remember stuff that would be dropped in the bottom of a boat. It would get full of sand. You never knew going in what was there until you got there, despite all the recon, information and everything else. I went into eight invasions, and was literally in the first wave on every one of them. So I just stayed with it.

VH: Let's go back to that hillside on Attu. Were you calling in fire in support of the 7th Division?

E: We were doing many things. We found out that, a lot of things that look great on paper don't turn out that way, as you well know. We found that we had we could not compartmentalize many tasks. We had forward observers who supposedly had their own equipment, and much of the time that stuff didn't work. So what would happen would be you'd get word back from (front line infantry battle) positions saying, 'We need this fire immediately…', so we would get on the frequency and pass that along. We literally became a conduit for whatever was necessary.

VH: From your vantage point, how well did the landings on Attu actually go?

E: The landings were fine. There was very poor preliminary intelligence for the Attu invasion. They really didn't have an idea of what the terrain we would be fighting on was like. Most of the guys got foot immersion. I remember the beach was not sand at all, it was thousands of little black rocks, and as a matter of fact those rocks saved my foot. I got, I guess you would call it, frostbite in my right foot. Our Lieutenant told a number of us, go down to the beach, see if you

can find a quartermaster, get some dry boots. I had to cut my boot off. There was a medical tent, and I saw a pile of boots outside. I saw guys go in, and they would throw the boot out. Well, very quickly we got the idea that they did not mess around, and someone with bad frostbite or gangrene, they took the foot off. I went down and cut my boot off, I stomped my foot on that beach rock until my foot was raw, but I got my circulation back. I got over to the Quartermaster, got myself some boots and got back up there.

VH: When you went back up, besides the cold, what else about the environment?

E: The weather would change almost instantaneously at five minute intervals. It could be raining one minute, it could be ice pellets the next, the sun would come out, it was incredible weather. It was almost nightmarish, being on top of the world.

VH: How was visibility?

E: Miserable. That was the other thing: we literally were without air support because they could not fly in that weather. Once in a while they would try to get something up from Adak, but we relied on fire support from off shore, destroyers and cruisers. Once you landed you were there and pretty much on your own. We stayed on the island until it was secured. They pulled us back to San Francisco. We suited up and we went back up to Kiska, which turned out to be a non-event really. We landed but there was nobody there.

VH: So when was the first time you actually came up against the Japanese?

E: At Attu. When we came down, once the landings had taken place, and we joined the regular forces, they countered attacked just about every night. I have to confess I can still remember. We were behind a bank of tundra dug in , and they (the Japanese) came down. We were not supposed to be fighting, we were the support troops, but when an attack came everybody had to fire, you didn't lay there. I can still remember the Lieutenant coming down and saying," C'mon you guys, you're not here for the fun of it, get those damn M1 carbines working!" As a matter of fact, we had gone in with Garands to Adak. They took them away and gave us carbines. It was the first time we had them. I can still remember firing with my eyes shut the first few times I did it. I was with a crusty tough sergeant, who had some from the logging camps up in Wisconsin, and he was with me through the entire war, and he said, "You know, your best bet to getting out of this is to fire that thing at as many people as you can!"

VH: What did you learn about the Japanese?

E: I didn't learn that much at Attu. I was pretty busy on Attu. Most of us who were doing radios were kept very busy. And that was good, because as long as you didn't think about what you were doing, that got you through. It kept your mind on your work, you did as well as you could. I found out about the Japanese on Kwajalein. At Makin, we heard them at night. They would try to get you to come out of your hole. They would say, 'Hey Joe, Hey Joe!' We learned from our

friend the Raiders not to fall for that. On Kwajalein I had an experience that taught me that Japanese soldiers are not much different from American soldiers. I have a chip right here in this tooth (gestures and points to his mouth). On Kwajalein, our positions, we dug in with v-trenches. In a 'v', you had a guy at the point, and a guy at each end (gestures with hands, fingers. Makes a v shape). The guy at one end of that 'v' was hit and at night, the Japanese intruder came in through that end. And I was whispering, and trying to see what was happening down at that end. I said, "You OK?" He said, "Yeah, yeah", something like that. But something was funny, so I started crawling toward that end, and someone was crawling, and suddenly we came face to face. Immediately you try to think about what you were taught about hand-to-hand combat. I assumed the position and grabbed his arm and came across like that (gestures with arms, trunk turning), never thinking that he had a foot free, which came up and caught me in the mouth (gestures to broken tooth). We both fell back and we looked at each other and he ran back like hell that way and I ran like hell that was (points in opposite directions). So I figured, he was just as human as I was- was glad to get the hell out of there (laughing).

VH: Let's go back to where you left Attu, you're on your way back to San Francisco: How did you feel at that point, you had survived your first combat.

E: The feeling is incredible. It's top of the world, we can take anything, do anything. That existed until we found out we had to go back, then (laughs, says 'oh sh#t!' under his breath). Nobody came back with anything. We left it all behind. First of all, we were ill- equipped for that battle. As I recall, the general in charge of that operation was relieved. General Corlett was the new general in charge for the Kiska operation. After all, somebody had to pay the price. One of the first things he did was to differentiate the troops who had tasted combat. There were not a lot of troops in the United States who had been in combat. He devised something called "Corlett's Longknives". All those who had been in the landings got these trench knives, which we were allowed to wear, a sidearm so to speak. We would swagger around with these, and they gave us a new patch. A special patch, and that differentiated us from everybody else. Of course, everybody made directly for the nearest bar to bask in the glory. My trench knife went by the wayside, as all such things. I came back with a bolo from the Philippines. That I kept.

VH: What were you expecting at Kiska?

E: All the way there, we expected the worst. They went through with the landings. Very quickly we learned there was nobody there. Very quickly they put us on a Liberty ship for almost a month, working our way south, all the way to Hawaii. They set us up in a camp behind Fort Shafter, in downtown Honolulu. We had to prepare for the Gilberts.

VH: When were assigned to the 27th Division?

E: That was with the Makin invasion. We were assigned to the 165th Regiment which of course was the old Fighting 69th. It wasn't until the last week or two before the convoy left for

the Gilberts when we trained with them. We went to the place, I am trying to remember, it was the other island. We did not join the regiment right away, they would isolate us. No more passes, we would study maps of where we were going. Our job was to provide communications for their training, so they would get used to working with us.

VH: Before the isolation period, did you get to see Hawaii? What was R&R like?

E: Of course there was King Street, which you must have heard about by now. King Street was several blocks, near the water, which was literally run by the military. There was barbed wire around it, and it was string of joints, mostly bars. The bars had other adjunct activity with it. You went in one end, if you indulged in activity with the young ladies there, you got stamped (on the hand). You did not depart (King Street) until you cleared the prophylactic, which in those days was not a happy one. The military ran it: their object was to keep you fit for duty. They would give you a little tube of something which would burn like hell. You would go in the latrine and squeeze it. It burned like hell, I only did it once and I never did it again (laughing)!

VH: Any other things to do?

E: Yes. One guy in our unit, he was working on a PhD when he got drafted. He would locate a library, the Honolulu Public Library, and he would drag me down there. I got to know the library pretty well. We would go down to Waikiki to the restaurants. There was a theater, and inside there were (huge decorative paintings of) palm trees and blue sky and stars. It was my first introduction to the tropics. It was my first time to see a centipede and a scorpion up close. At night, if you had to go to the latrine, you had to walk on these boards. If you stepped off, you might step on a scorpion, you would know it.

VH: What about the other tropical islands?

E: The Marshalls and the Gilberts were nothing more than sand and palm trees and some low bushes. The one thing you worried about at night, believe it or not, were these crabs that had a large shell. They would cast a shadow and it would look like a helmet. (gestures to it crawling like a soldier). And they would scuttle, and the moon was very bright in the tropics, and you would this thing like a helmet in the brush.

VH: Before Makin, what did you do next?

E: We boarded, did calisthenics, have meetings with our non-coms and officers to go over the maps, to make sure we knew everything. We would not get the code until we were well out. You get to know people. That was my first introduction to one (Marine general Holland M.) 'Howlin' Mad' Smith. He came aboard to talk to us. That was a transport; it was not a Liberty ship. I am trying to remember the name, but I can't. We fared pretty well, since we were communications people, we would 'spell' navy personnel on the bridge. That way we would get

the better food, which the navy people always got. We could spend our time topside more than down below where the troops were ordered.

I still remember gathering on the fantail. He is standing on a hatch cover haranguing us about what we had to live up to with the marines. He was not a very likeable character. He was addressing the army troops, the 165th. We were going down with people who had done it all, the heroics, the whole business. He would begin his talk with a litany of all of the most famous engagements the marines had been in and he embellished it with how many men had died in each one. It amazed me that what he seemed to care about most was how glorious that was and 'here we lost 5,000 and here we lost 10,000' and it was about how these men obtained glory for the corps. I thought I wanted more humanity in a commander. I don't know what the military services are like today. There was not a lot of talk, free talk, among the men in general, as I recall, pro or con. Usually, talk was with one or two people that you would get to know better. Men were more taciturn about what they were going into. There was a reticence to show fear or to let anybody else think that you did not understand what it was all about. I don't know if people are more loquacious today or not. My sense was that these were people who, even among the draftees, who realized they were there for a very serious job. And they were concerned, but most of their concerns were communicated to confidants, not out in the open. I should qualify a lot of what I am now remarking with this: Once we had done Attu and Kiska, and had become this more or less special unit, it was taking others in, and we had been there, we knew what it was all about. We did not really associate that closely with the others. We were sort of separate and apart. You liked that because it made you sort of special. Others looked to you like, 'They have been in combat.'

VH: So, you are on a transport, and you are approaching the objective. What preparations did you take?

E: We pack our kits. The sergeant would come down, see that everyone had what you needed, ammunition. We would meet with the communications chief and get the codes. Our preparation time was spent with specific housekeeping chores, which in a way was good because it kept you from dwelling too much on what you were facing there. Always the commanding officer would come down and give you a talk: 'Do your best…keep your head down.' Then , over the loud speaker the orders to board the landing craft would begin, and we would go down the cargo nets into the boats. I met Father Joseph Meany, Chaplain of the 165th who was aboard. The night before, he held services for all the men who wanted it, all three religions: Protestant , Catholic and Jewish. I did not go to any of the services but a friend of mine went to mass. I sort of stood back and listened and the last thing he said I still remember was (Paul Elisha speaking in Irish brogue), 'And now, tomorrow morning, you will go among the heathen and do our work. I will meet you on the beach. And for those who don't make it there I will see you in Heaven. And for those who don't make it there the devil take you!' He got wounded. I tried very hard not to think about stuff. I tried to focus on the maps and the codes. If I started to think about other stuff, I would start to get worried.

VH: Tell us about when you climbed down the cargo net into the boat.

E: The tension would mount. You would see other guys more nervous, that would affect you. I have to say: the military at that time was not that politically correct as it is today. If you were from any ethnic minority, you took a lot of ribbing, some of it good-natured, some of it not. I being Jewish, took some good-natured ribbing, and again, some that was quite hurtful. I soon learned from my interactions with the rest of the company, that there were non-Jewish members of that group that expected you, because you were Jewish, to be yellow and inept. I was determined to disprove that. A lot of my responses and the way I reacted, looking back now, were colored by that. I was determined to never be seen in a situation of acting frightened, or worried, or anything like that. Some of that was bravado, I am sure, but I felt very good as long as I stayed close to that sergeant of mine who was tough guy. He said, "You can stick with me." And I did; the problem of course that he really WAS tough and didn't care about going where it was dangerous!

VH: Where was he from?

E: He was Two Rivers, Wisconsin. His name was Elmer Kominsky and he came out of the logging camps. And believe it or not I talked to him about three months ago. He's now in a nursing facility, because of arthritic knees. He was a tough guy, and I felt if I stuck with him I would come out alright.

VH: Was he Regular Army?

E: I think he joined the Army probably in '39 or '40. He came in before Pearl Harbor.

VH: So there you are in the boat?

E: Yeah, what you do is go in large circles, each boat goes to its assembly area, you just keep circling around and around. The destroyer goes ahead to line of departure, drops a flare in the water or a marking buoy. Then they come along side and say, 'First wave, form up!' Then you (the boats in wave) string out (gestures with arms in a line formation). Then the bombardment goes out. The bombardment lifts, and the first wave hits the line and goes for the beach. As I recall at Makin, a line of navy TBFs or something came in and strafed like crazy. It began to look like it would be duck soup. Then the Higgins boats ground up on the reef. You could hear them trying to pull off. Then they said, "I'm sorry guys, you have to get off here." They dropped the front ends and off we went.

VH: How deep of water were you in?

E: About waist high (gestures with hands at belt line) . It varied with terrain underneath you.

VH: Were the Japanese firing on you at this point?

E: Mostly, I recall there were still shells landing on the beach. I heard a lot of fire but you could not tell what it was. Things were so hectic going in you were not sure what you wanted to do: you see that beach, and you want to get there, and lie down. That's the first thing you wanted to do! Not make a target, you know? We got to about fifty or sixty yards off the beach when machine guns opened up. I went down. When I came up I saw these guys lying in the water, and I realized that they had been hit. I just pushed like hell and headed for the beach. We made it, found my sergeant, he said, "Alright you guys, follow me!" We just went. The guys from the infantry were there of course, they just formed lines, skirmish lines, and we started to set up.

VH: What initially were you doing on the beach?

E: Running a radio, that was our job. They set up a command post immediately. We began to run communications. As quickly as the Lieutenant got the lay of the beach, he had our guys run telephone wires to the different landing parties, make sure we were in touch with them, so we could send their requests back. We were the initial communications center for the beachhead.

VH: Did you get a chance to watch any of the 165th in action?

E: Yes. Surely, they were all around us.

VH: Did you form any impressions about them?

E: I thought- this is why I got so upset after I heard about the Saipan thing. These people were businesslike, orderly, conscientious, followed their officers and non-commissioned officers directions. The went about the business of taking that island. They did what they were directed to do. As I understand it, in post-mortem period (after the fact), Smith was very angry, Howlin' Mad Smith was very angry, because it ostensibly took two days longer than he wanted, for the island to be taken. But they followed Army procedure, which was don't, you know, they didn't to throw their troops in there to be shot down. They followed envelopment and recon, things of that sort, all good solid tactics and it all worked. I mean, they were not overdue, they just didn't do it as fast as he would have liked to have had it done. But they did it and they took their casualties.

VH: So how long were in Makin?

E: Four or five days, that's all.

VH: So what else did you observe initially after setting up on the beach?

E: I could not believe this (laughing). I thought about this. Several hours after we had landed, the battle was going on. Out of the bushes came two local people, a young woman and her young brother. She must have somewhere around seventeen or eighteen, I guess he must have been about twelve or thirteen. He had a loincloth of some sort on, she had a grass skirt, period.

VH: Was this Makin Mary?

E: I don't know who it was, but anyway, she decided to help us. She got her kid brother to run the generator when the guy got tired. We gave her some K Rations. They just hung around. They did not get in the way. They did not bother anything, they were just sort of there. They felt safe, near the command post. We later found out, that one of first that happened when the place was secured, was an order came ashore along with several hundred navy skivvy shirts, (looked) like t- shirts. With an order, I don't know who originated this order, if it was Howlin' Mad or anybody else, but henceforth, all native female population would wear t-shirts. Well, the females LOVED this idea and they went ahead and wore them on their heads, tied them around (gestures to head, laughs). Whereupon, somebody come ashore for the occupation of the military government unit, somebody requested a meeting with the Chief, the elder of the island. I'm told that in that meeting he was told that the population would not walk around bare (naked). And he said, "You have to understand, our people have done this for centuries, they don't see anything bad. " "Well, you can't flaunt that in front of our people." At which point, the chief supposedly said, "I can vouch for my people if you can vouch for yours." (Paul laughing)

VH: We are talking about Makin, and a character almost exactly like Makin Mary has been described to me. I wish I had a picture of her to show you. I got one back in the office. What were your other impressions about Makin?

E: The one impression I carried back afterward was that I wish I had seen it under peaceful circumstances. It was one of the most beautiful settings I had ever seen. The moon was so bright at night you could almost read by it. I remember feeling badly that we'd messed it up. I realized it had to be done. But I thought I'd like to see it again sometime.

VH: Did you get to go back?

E: No. Matter of fact, now that I'm in communications, I would to go back to the route I took and see what's happened at all those places. And maybe react to it.

VH: So after the initial battle on Makin, how did the battle proceed, from your vantage point?

E: I thought it was a very smooth operation. There were no major gaffes anywhere, it was wrapped up, the island was secured, it was only afterwards that we learned that the Marine Commandant (HM Smith?) was upset about everything. He felt it took them too long. I thought it had been an efficiently run operation. None of the communications, that I heard actively going on were from anybody upset, or something that didn't go according to plan, or anything like that. It was just a battle that was followed and worked out. Interestingly enough, when it was over, the media reports were all about the marines and the Gilberts and of Tarawa, and it was almost a throwaway (marginalized account or report) of Makin. And in some of the reports, it was almost as if the Army had not been there.

VH: Why do you think that was?

E: Well, for one thing, the marines had one hell of a PR outfit working for them, and they used it. I think the Army was there to do their job.

VH: How did you feel about the fact that the Raiders had attacked Makin before you got there? Did that make your work any harder?

E: We had known about that. They told us all about it in training. By the way, there was an interesting difference between Colonels Carlson, Roosevelt, and Howlin' Mad Smith. Throughout our training, Carlson's and Roosevelt's, it was emphasized to us, and I can still remember the talk we got from Jimmy Roosevelt, in which he emphasized, how badly they felt about the few casualties they had had, on Makin. Those were too many, they felt. They had fifteen or sixteen, I forget how many men were left on Makin, were killed in the operation. But, he kept emphasizing that if you do your job right, it will keep you alive. Our object is not to get you killed, it's to keep you alive so you can do it again. And he kept emphasizing that. It was NOTHING like you heard from Howlin' Mad Smith, who didn't give a damn, he wanted to get this thing done, I don't care what it takes. And it was a callousness, about the well-being of the people in his trust, really, in his charge, that he was prepared to sacrifice them. I am not saying that everyone doesn't think 'so be it, so be it', but that shouldn't be the objective. The objective should be 'let's do this and keep as many alive as we can'. And that was the glaring difference that I remembered between what I'd seen at Pendleton in my training, and this general (HM Smith).

[Tape ends.]