

**Albert J. Harris**  
**Veteran**

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**Michael Aikey**  
**Interviewer**

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**DMNA Headquarters, Latham, NY**

Q: We're interviewing Albert J. Harris at the Saratoga Armory. It is July 30th, 2001. The interviewer is Michael Aikey. The videographer is Wayne Clarke. Al, where were you born?

A: I was born in Harris, New York which is a small hamlet down between Monticello and Liberty. I lived there until I was through high school. I went to high school in Monticello and from then on I moved to New York right after that in Brooklyn. I was in Brooklyn at the time the war started in '41.

During '42, I realized I better start looking for some spot. I was very vulnerable at 18 years old and single so I shopped around and hit on and tried the Marines and I enlisted and I was called up on December 7th, 1942. They made a big thing of it at the time. There's a whole down on Lower Broadway the recruiting thing had a room full of people and it made the front page of the *Daily News* and the *Post* and everything that day. Then we went into oblivion (laughs).

Q: Why did you decide on the Marines? You looked around?

A: I shopped a few places. I didn't want particularly to go into the Navy because I thought I might not enjoy life aboard ship you're sort of confined there a good part of the time. The Army had no appeal. I don't know. It just I was 18 years old and I wasn't thinking things out too well. At the time. I probably made a foolish move but I just went.

Q: You were sworn in on was it December 7<sup>th</sup>?

A: December 7th, '42 we left to go down to Parris Island.

Q: What were the thoughts that went through your head when you heard the Japanese had just bombed Pearl Harbor?

A: Probably my first thought I was wondering where the hell was Pearl Harbor like everybody else. I don't remember any particular emotions really at the time. I didn't know much about the....I wasn't following the world situation. I didn't know there had been a crisis for a couple of years.

Q: You were 18.

A: I was just existing in New York.

Q: So, was your trip to Parris Island your first time really away from home?

A: Outside of trips down to the city to ball games and things like that, yes, it was my first really away from home.

Q: What was that experience like, Parris Island?

A: Horrible (laughs). It was twelve weeks of hell. You just kept thinking that you weren't going to die and that seemed like a terrible prospect. But it was...as soon as you stepped foot on the base, it takes about...you are independent type kids and all types of people. You're on the base about two minutes or less and you already become molded in their image. They come down on you like just unbelievable. It's very hard.

They tell you not to worry about the people at home. They forgot about you already. You better give your soul to the lord because your ass belongs to the Marine Corps. They did everything they could to make your twelve (weeks) miserable. It had its moments but it I didn't think too much about it. I was too busy doing what they told me to.

Q: Was it good training for what you had to do?

A: No but it was good training and discipline. It was massive training in discipline and that was the whole name of the game anyway.

Q: Any events stand out in your mind during basic?

A: Not really. A lot of petty....I guess just dominating....they just made you aware that you belonged to them. Then they started to build up a pride and the fact that you were in an elite unit and that you better live up to the other people and stuff like that. But what they did, they did very well and did it fast .You got to know the basics of being a Marine. It wasn't anything that helped me later on.

Q: How was it being a New Yorker? Was there any...?

A: Probably there were a lot of New Yorkers in it. Our whole bunch coming down from Broadway were basically, I suppose, New Yorkers. To tell you the truth, I didn't do that much socializing. I didn't have time to find out much about anybody. I didn't make any close friends.

Q: Do you think that was typical?

A: Yes. It was tough.

Q: Once you get done with basic where is your next...?

A: Then they shipped me up to Camp Lejeune which is in North Carolina. That's the east coast Marine training base. At that time, they were just forming the 4th Marine Division. I was one of the first people that came into the 4th Marines.

We were there probably...it was just a nucleus of people probably a month or two that's all. Then they moved us across the country on a troop train to Camp Pendleton, California. At Camp Pendleton, they formalized the whole outfit. I became an Assistant Machine Gunner in the 24th Marines. That was the 4th Division. K Company.

Then I started to build relationships with the other people in your platoon. You never had much chance to socialize with the rest of the regiment. I wouldn't have known the rest of the regiment probably if I fell over them. But I did get to know people in the company. Our company was, of course, about two hundred, two hundred and fifty people. I knew them by sight and the people in my platoon were very close of course.

Q: What was your sergeant like?

A: He was a post war Marine. He was solidly of the old school type. He wasn't a bad guy. He didn't work out too great in combat but he wasn't bad just ordinary. He knew what had to be done in the way of training. You see the problem with the training at that time, they didn't have much to go by. They were fighting... by this time it was obvious that they knew that the Marines were going to be strictly a Pacific force and they were fighting an enemy that was nothing like World War I. That's the only basis they had of how to train people, World War I which was trench warfare. So, they trained us and spent a lot of time on things that were ridiculous but they had to keep us busy.

I remember I took a long time, two or three weeks, Semaphore. In the islands out there if you raised a Semaphore flag, you'd have been long dead before you got the second flag up there. It was useless stuff

They trained very little live ammunition training - none. I never threw a grenade. I never threw a live grenade. I was the assistant gunner on the 30 caliber machine gun but the only thing I did was carry the ammunition. I never fired it on the range.

Q: Was it air cooled?

A: Water cooled. That's another story too. They trained us on how to take apart the water cooled and how to carry it with the big tripod and everything. We never used it in combat. You couldn't use a water cooled in the islands carry a water cooled machine gun. So, we used the air cooled 30. I'll tell you, all the training they did, it was kind of worthless because I think I would have learned how to dig a hole by myself or climb down the net of a ship. I could have figured that out without them telling me.

But again, it goes back to their strong point and that was command and discipline. You've got to realize that you obey what you are told to do. There was no....you knew where you stood. They had to do something to pass the time. I see now a lot of times on the History Channel they show the Marine training and it's so much more sophisticated than it was then. But, it worked. We were young probably most of the people were eighteen years old average. Even the junior officers might have been twenty four, twenty five.

Q: After Camp Pendleton, where did you go?

A: I've got to get a drink of water.

Q: Sure.

A: We were at Pendleton up until January 13th, 1944.

Q: That long?

A: Yes. I joined in '43. It was about a year. We left San Diego. We shipped out from San Diego. We stopped at Pearl Harbor. At the time, it was still a mess. In fact, we stopped there for a couple of days to pick up the rest of the convoy. I remember they gave us a day off just to stretch our legs. They had planking going from our transport across the side of the Oklahoma and from Oklahoma to Ford Island where they had a little recreation for us. That was my first visit any place outside the United States was walking across the Oklahoma. It probably still had bodies in it at that time.

Q: What was your impression of Pearl Harbor? Any thoughts?

A: I was awed by the destruction. Of course what they had released at the time to the general public didn't cover the situation. But anyway, we were only there for a few days. Then the whole convoy we went out and we landed on the Marshall Islands. We attacked Roi-Namur which was the first pre-war Japanese Island.

Q: What was that...?

A: That was very successful. It was only two days I think to take this atoll. The Army 7th Division took Kwajalein itself which is on the southern end of the atoll. It was very successful. Their losses - we only lost two or three hundred killed.

Q: Anybody from your regiment?

A: From my platoon and battalion. Yes. In fact, we had a Congressional Medal of Honor winner - a guy named Sorenson(Richard K. Sorenson) who fell on a grenade and apparently saved the lives of some in our company (note: Richard K. Sorenson actually survived his wounds and continued to serve in the Marines)

Q: What was it like, your first experience in combat?

A: Well, it was... I can still...it wasn't bad. What they did. The atoll is very big like a big pearl necklace made up of little islands. They moved the convoy in to the attack ships which we were on. We were on LST's at this time. Inside the harbor they moved us. That morning early, they put us into the LSTs and started to circle us around to get the waves together.

Then, when it was going to be the H-Hour on D-Day, they start straightening up the lines and they make these lines - I was in the first wave going in - they make these lines to get them just in the right order that they want. Then, so you go past the destroyer escorts maybe we're couple of thousand feet off the shore. As we went by them going into the shore, I remember looking up at them and have the sailors waving at us and thought holy Christ what have we gotten into here (laughs). That was the first thing I realized I should be someplace else. This is terrible. It looked like two to one you won't come back.

Our particular ship landed in a pretty good spot. We didn't land right in front of the pillboxes. It wasn't too bad. I jumped off. They're quite high the LST's. I mean the LCVPs – the tracked vehicles. I was so loaded when I jumped off with gear everything from gas masks to strips of ammunition. I was the instrument corporal theoretically. Nobody knew what that was but I had all that crap. I had range finders and I had maps and binoculars like Rommel. When I went off the thing, I went flat on my face in the surf. That was my first invasion. It was alright.

That was another thing going back to the old World War I philosophy. Everybody in the squad had a job and that's all they knew such as assistant gunner or instrument corporal and runners all these World War I things that meant something. So, they told me I'd be the instrument corporal. That sounded good. I was only a PFC. I thought instrument corporal, I get a promotion. But, no, there was no promotion.

Nobody did anything until we were about two weeks from sailing leaving California and suddenly all this fancy gear started to come in labeled for the instrument corporal. I had this range finder that looked like a golf bag in a beautiful leather case. I had no idea even how to open the case. Why would we need a range finder on an atoll? I had another instrument which came in a smaller leather case something to do with map making. I had a stop watch. I had a pair of binoculars that big in a case again. I had a map case.

Q: And all your regular equipment.

A: And all my regular equipment. I said to the sergeant what am I going to do with this? He said I don't know but you hold on to it. Lose it and it's your ass. And my gas mask too. I carried all this crap. I threw it away first thing. Nobody asked me about it. That was the end of the instrument corporal. I guess they felt they could win the war without instrument corporals.

Q: That's a great story.

A: That lasted two days. Then they put us back aboard ship and we went back to Maui which was to be our training ground. That was about a thousand miles back. So, the whole division was put into a tent camp which they had built on the side of the....have you ever been to Hawaii? They have a big volcano called Haleakala. They put this massive tent camp there and that was our training grounds for about the next about four or five months. Then we went off again to attack Saipan and Tinian.

Q: Had they learned any lessons in the first invasions?

A: I think the only thing they had to learn....

Q: Except that they didn't need an Instrument Corporal...

A: Yes. One important thing that they learned not from that operation but from the one just before which was made by the 2nd Marine division. That was Tarawa. In Tarawa a lot of the landing boats got hung up on the coral and people had to wade in. They were decimated.

This time, for our invasion, they had gotten a hold of all of these track vehicles which would go over the coral. So, everybody got in. That was very important thing about them. But, the position that the Japanese were in by this time was always defense and they were dug in. I never saw a live Japanese in my four battles. I never saw one live one.

Q: Now, what were you told about Saipan?

A: On our way to Saipan, they told us quite a bit about the contour of the island, what we could expect and where the various....they had a mockup of the island on the ship. They told us whatever they knew about it which was limited. I would say that we had all we needed.

Q: The overall commander of that operation was Holland Smith.

A: Holland Smith.

Q: Did you know anything about him to begin with?

A: I only knew as high as my Lieutenant. I didn't know anybody further on. Anything about him, I had read later on.

Q: You were at Saipan. You were with the first wave?

A: No, I was with the reserve regiment. We came in about I think H-hour was about 11 o'clock. We landed at about five.

Q: What part of the island did you land on?

A: We landed below Garapan which was one of the large cities. Well, they weren't very large. We landed. By the time we landed, things were very quiet. It was starting....maybe it was a little

later than that...because it was starting to get dark. My platoon was in amongst a bunch of what looked like a bunch of it looked like gas tanks or barrels. I remember I was looking at my squad leader who was right in front of me. His shoe was right in my face practically and things were very suspiciously quiet.

All of the sudden, we heard that first shell coming in. That first shell it exploded somewhere near me and I was looking at his shoe and a piece of shrapnel took the heel of his shoe right off in front of me. Then, they just kept pouring them in on us.

I remember somebody yelling to get out of there because there's gas in there. We didn't know where to get out of to. Nobody's giving any orders or anything but people started to move forward. This was the most horrible moment of my life. As you move forward it looked like all of the world war pictures that you ever saw in your life were happening all around you. All of these explosions. I was in a daze. I went I don't know how much further. We just kept moving forward. Finally, we came to a ditch - a curved ditch and somebody said "Get down in the ditch!" We plopped in there. All night long there was firing and people were hit in the ditch.

If you had wounded, you didn't know where to go. I didn't have the foggiest idea where the beach was or where to take anybody. You just felt if you were moving around, you were going to get killed. So, I remember that went on all night. The whole thing - the whole episode from the time of the first shell practically is just like a dream. On Roi-Namur, we hadn't anything like that.

Q: So, you really weren't prepared for this.

A: No and the casualties were horrible. I remember just at dawn, just about dawn, I looked up from the trenches. It has quieted down a bit. I saw this Marine sort of sitting up over the trench. I thought what's he doing up there. I looked up and saw that he was decapitated.

By the next morning, it had quieted down. What had happened, the Navy - of course we had a lot of Navy all around us - was now able to see where the artillery was coming from up in the mountains so they started to control them. We were able to start moving again. We had a couple more barrages but not as bad as then. Saipan was very tough. It was physically demanding.

Our first night, we lost half of our people either dead or wounded. The only thing we had left was what we carried. I didn't have a pack or anything. I just had my ammunition and a belt and my carbine and water. That was it.

The organization was scattered. Nobody knew where anybody was because of the barrage. It took a while for that to get all organized again.

Q; How did you get food?

A: They finally brought food in. The beach wasn't that far away. Once they could stand up on it and do things. It was twenty five days or so of really a lot of things happened. It was just the heat of the place. It's on the equator. It was in June and July. So, it was hot.

The place was full of bodies. The bodies caused maggots. The maggots caused flies. During the day, you couldn't even put any food up in your mouth or anything because the flies would cover your spoon. You couldn't go to the bathroom because they'd be after that. You'd have to wait until night to have a bowel movement. You'd walk along and the flies would get on every little scratch you had. You'd have five or six of them trying to get to the blood. You just had to walk along like this (waves his hand in front of his face). That went on for most of the time.

Q: Was there anything you had to worry about more than anything else? Was it worse at night?

A: Worse at night? Yes. The fear was worse at night but the Japanese didn't move around at night. As it turned out, didn't fire much at night because they were afraid of the counter fire. I know on our gun we had to keep awake all night so we did one hour off and one hour on all night. One hour on goes mighty fast when you have to...no, it was bad. The thing about it too- the island was full of civilians. They got hurt too- badly.

Q: Did you meet up with any of the 27th Division?

A: Yes. We once - in the middle of the island - we were going to the coast, to the west coast through this trail. They were coming in another direction and somebody told me who they were - just two roads that passed in the day.

I was telling Wayne, just looking at them they looked like they were older people than us. Old, they were probably twenty two or twenty three years old. They seemed so much older than us. I guess they were just shifting positions between the two divisions.

Q: Were there any comments at that time about the Army performance?

A: No, not at our level.

Q: (unclear)

A: Communications when you're just a soldier you don't know much what's going on. All I knew what was going in the battle was what I could see.

An interesting thing happened there. About the fifth day on the island - as I mentioned there was a monstrous convoy that brought us there. There were battleships, transports, supply ships, repair ships. The whole harbor was full of ships.

So, we were up on this high ground at this point about the fourth or fifth night. They were still there. When it got bright the next morning, we looked out and there was nothing in the harbor. A



few little harbor boats. You thought, my god, are we doing that bad they left us here (laughs)? I knew we weren't doing very good but...

What had happened was that the Japanese fleet had been sighted and they had a big battle called the "Turkey Shoot of the Marianas" where they destroyed practically the air force of the Japanese. That was they pulled out for. That Japanese convoy was heading for the Marianas to probably shell us.

Q: So that must have been a pretty scary.....

A: It was (laughs). I didn't want anybody to leave me there!

Then the end of the battle, the end of the campaign there had the most eerie, bizarre thing that I ever saw in my life.

Up at the end at a place called Marpi Point. We were there for two or three days just watching people commit suicide.

Q: Really.

A: Civilians basically jumping into the water, blowing themselves up with grenades, having their own soldiers shoot them.

I'd seen whole families standing on a rock right along the ocean and explode a grenade and then maybe a survivor would crawl off into that water.

Q: What was going through your mind as an eighteen or nineteen year old?

A: I think by that time I was a little deadened about anything shocking me. I thought much more about it in years after.

What had happened was the end of the island was covered with a shrubbery very tight like a hedge. It was also coral and it was pot marked with these holes so people could get in these holes all along there. Then there was a cliff just about a thousand feet from the edge which had caves in the underside.

There was a path going down into the flatland before you got into the water. But they had gotten into, the people, the civilians who were afraid of us probably terrified of these people coming. There were some Japanese soldiers apparently up in the cave underneath where we were standing. A lot of other people were hidden in these caves all along.

So, we went down there originally .We sent scouts down there. A couple of them got killed by the snipers so we pulled back to the cliff line and then had the Japanese speakers try to convince the people that we weren't going to harm them. But I would imagine like "who are they kidding?"

There nothing much they could do at that point. They just started killing. After, I went down on a patrol after about the third or fourth day. I went down to this big cave that was underneath it was bigger than this room. It was carved out. It was full of bodies. It was piles of Japanese bodies in the middle of it- a stack of them with ten million flies. I remember, we carried a few. I remember I carried a little girl back, in fact, to the lines. She must have been about five or six. She had a shrapnel wound in her cheek right through it. She wasn't whimpering or anything. I remember I returned her to the civilians there or the Red Cross whoever but it was horrible. I remember, in the whole war there couldn't have been a much more bizarre thing.

Q: Now after Saipan was secured.

A: We hung around there for a few days getting a couple of hot meals. Then we went back aboard ship – the same ship we came on. It pulled up out in the ocean a little ways because Tinian, our next objective, is only three or four miles. So, we went out just far enough to make another invasion and the next morning we came back and invaded Tinian.

Q: What was landing there like?

A: It was very different because they expected us to land down on the part of the island where the beach was- Tinian town. They surprised them by landing us on this very small beach on the upper end. A small very rocky didn't look like (unclear). In fact, instead of landing a whole group of people a couple of people in a row, they landed us in company formation one company right behind another. That's how we landed there. There was very little opposition. It put us in a good position. That night they had a banzai attack.

Q: Let's just hold right there. We are going to change....

A: The whole situation....in my experience, here I was in four battles, some of the most vicious of the whole war, I never saw a hero. I never saw one hero. I saw people trying to stay alive doing their job doing what they were told. I never saw anybody above and beyond the line of duty. I read about all of these wonderful things everybody was doing and thought what's happening to me (laughs)?

Q: That's interesting.

A: I mean even the Persian Gulf which lasted two days and only had maybe a hundred battle casualties yet they came up with all these medals. Even the Oklahoma bomber got a medal – Bronze Star. It must have been a different caliber of people or they are a lot more talented that are writing up their citations. But that's beside the point.

Q: On Tinian....

A: On Tinian, the start of it was very hectic because of the banzai attack.

Q: What was that like?

A: It didn't hit right in front of my line. The Japanese were decimated again by it. I remember when we finally moved out walking through piles of bodies. They were lined up. They came up there from Tinian Town where they expected us to land. The troops came up during the night and just made that attack.

After that there was just a scattering of resistance the rest of the way down until you got to the end of the island. This was about seven days later. Then we pretty well held up quite a while in a rocky area. We took a lot of casualties there. As I remember, tanks that had to be finally brought up. Again, they're all firing. You never knew where they were firing from. They were firing from cover.

Q: Did you often work with tanks?

A: Not often, no.

Q: What was the shape of the platoon after Tinian because you'd been in two campaigns pretty close together?

A: We were in good shape. Our losses weren't that terrible. We had losses but we were in fairly good shape.

Q: Morale pretty good?

A: Yeah. I thought we were...it just felt by this time god we're going to be here forever. We were going to be out (unclear) forever. There was never any thought about when you'd get back or get home. You felt well this is my life I guess. This is the way I'll spend my days. The whole war looked at that point like god if the Japanese were going to fight for every isle and every spot like this there's no way.

Q: When you weren't in combat, any forms of recreation?

A: After this, we went back after Tinian but one little incident about Tinian.

Q: Sure.

A: I remember we were on a patrol sort of just a mop up type thing. There was five or six of us who went through this wooded area. We came into a clearing and there was a whole family of Japanese who had hung themselves. Apparently, they fastened a rope and then just sat down. There was a mother, father and two kids hanging and bloated. Strictly because they were, I guess, in fear of these invaders and they had probably been told. Even with something like that, at this point, what could you do? You just looked at it blasé and that was part of the day. It's the type of thing now fifty years later that you think harder than you did at the time.

Q: Does it bother you fifty years later?

A: No, it doesn't bother me. I don't know. It puts a lot of things in perspective.

Q: Absolutely. Now after Tinian, you went back...

A: We went back again this is a very long trip back to Maui. It took almost a month and a half. We had prisoners. They had picked up some prisoners so we had them in the hold.

Q: What were they like or didn't have much contact?

A: They kept them in the hold. You never saw them. The only way you saw them was once or twice a day they'd bury them at sea sliding them down the plank.

I'll tell you as far as treatment of the Japanese prisoners and the dead, we never made any attempt to identify the bodies- who they were. All the Japanese that went into a shallow (unclear) were covered over by a bulldozer. They're all missing in action – all the Japanese dead or else they'd be sealed in the caves they were in when they were blown up.

I never saw in all the while and I helped bury a lot of Japanese but I never saw any attempt to identify anyone. Even though, I'm sure that had identification on them.

Q: Did that bother you?

A: It does now when I hear we are trying to get the North Vietnamese to give us all sorts of records on our dead and everything. I thought, that's a little odd. I think we're being a little hypocritical here.

Q: Was it good to get back to Maui?

A: We went back to Maui and just get our replacements to fill in the ranks and did normal marching and training and stuff. Once and a while, we used to get daytime liberty in one of the small towns on the island.

Q: Any USO?

A: No. I don't remember the USO there.

Q: How were the replacements treated when they initially came in?

A: Very good. A lot of time, the poor guys were brought in right during the battle and shoved in the line without knowing anybody. That was very typical. That's the way a lot of them arrived. A lot of them came in and died and nobody knew who they guy was.

Q: Were they treated well when they came in?

A: Yes. I thought.

Q: So, you were in Maui about how long?

A: Let me think. We left for Iwo Jima probably about November. The convoy took quite a while forming. Probably November, we left for Iwo.

Q: Were you given any....?

A: Once we were aboard ship, we knew where we were going.

Q: OK.

A: By that time, we had a pretty good guess anyway because they had been bombing Iwo for about two months (unclear). A lot of talk was that we were going to Truk if you've heard that name?

Q: Yes.

A: That was a big base that they eventually bypassed.

Q: Go ahead.

A: It took a long while to get up there.

Q: In your first sighting of Iwo, was there anything going through your mind? Just another Island?

A: It was pretty awesomely bad! It wasn't very picturesque. We landed again as a reserve regiment. We came in, again, about six o'clock at night. We were sort of hanging around all day waiting to get on boats – the landing boats. I kind of kept hoping they cancelled the whole thing with one of us surrendering either them or us!

When we went in, the guy, the Japanese commander, built such an intelligent defense. The upper part of the island was honeycombed with caves – completely a network of unbelievable caves. The lower part, the lower one third was the landing area. Mt. (Suribachi) was at the end.

He let almost two divisions of Marines get on the island with only modest amount of resistance. Then he just massacred the people on the beach for four days. He stopped the front lines from going any further through his line of caves network. For four days, people were on the beach. The beach was only about the size of one hole on a golf course. You had all these bodies and anything you threw there is going to hit something.

Q: The topography there is much different than Saipan.

A: Oh yeah. Iwo. I never saw a tree on Iwo. The part where all the caves were looked like a massive rock pit that had been hit by an atom bomb. No organization to it. Bodies. Small boulders. Big boulders. Cliffs.

The beach was.... had on both sides there was beach with black sand sort of like...I don't know if you could call it sand it was more of a gravel – black gravel. When you stepped in it, it made a very big like an elephant. The only feature was where the famous flag raising was...

Q: Suribachi?

A: Suribachi.

Q: What was it like being on that beach? Basically, there was no cover.

A: That's right. I came ashore at the time I had been transferred to the battalion intelligence section. I was what they called the intelligence scout. Theoretically, I was supposed to find material of intelligence value. It didn't work out. I ended up being a "gofer" for the colonel in charge of the battalion whose name was Vandergrift. He was the son of the Commandant of the Marine Corps.

Q: What's he like?

A: He was a wild man. I think he was trying to live up to the name. He was a Lieutenant Colonel.

Anyway, I had two guys in my little group (unclear). When I came ashore. The shore, you couldn't believe it because they hit a lot of boats coming in so the shore was just amazingly with every sort of debris and junk and bodies and everything.

I came ashore about it was just getting dark again. I fell on the ground just as soon as I got out of the water (unclear). There is a guy laying there right next to me with his rifle out and everything. (unclear). I looked at him and he had been shot at some point during the day right through the helmet (points to his forehead). He was looking perfectly normal no blood. I didn't see anything but he was dead.

We didn't have any place else. We didn't see any of our guys that we were supposed to be with or any in our company. So, we ran ashore about two hundred feet or so, three hundred. I told the guys, dig in a little spot. I dug a hole next to him. Other people start to dig in all around us. The whole place was full of guys digging in. That's where we were for three days because the front line troops had been held up on the other side of the airport.

Somebody made a big mistake by putting that many people on shore. But, the Japanese who were firing from the upper artillery and mortars they couldn't miss. Any time they fired a mortar, if it hit the islands, it could hit some of us.

I remember once during the night. This was in the midst of a barrage. This thing came flying in on me. I felt it and I felt a face. I thought oh my god if this is the face, I've had it. It was part of a gas mask that resembles a face. That's what I felt.

After three days, I didn't know where the company was. I wasn't going to walk round looking for them. They weren't looking for me that's for sure. I finally did locate them, locate where I was supposed to be. Then I went a number of times up to the lines with the Colonel and the other times I went with my group just trying to find things that were of intelligence value but actually it turned out we were just souvenir hunting practically.

We went down a number of caves foolishly. One time, we went down just the three of us in this cave. It was covered with branches and everything so it was camouflaged but it had steps carved down into it out of the stone. Stone wasn't easy to carve.

So I went down maybe ten steps and there was a dead Japanese in the middle of the steps. So, I walked over him. I have a flashlight and I have a 45 that I borrowed. I went down the cave then right ahead of me it went about thirty feet and then curved. It was full of boxes and stuff. Then off to the right and left there were other caves.

So, I am looking at all the caves and everything. I raise the flashlight and I am sure that I saw a face looking around the corner at me. So, I shot at it and the whole thing lit up. I started backing up out of the cave like a western up backwards all the way up past the dead body. That was my last visit in a cave. Holy Jesus. Then I heard later on that people got in real trouble in these caves just foolishness.

I was there, of course, on that flag raising but it really didn't make much of a difference to us at the time. It wasn't any strategic value.

Q: Did you see it?

A: I could see it. I think now when I heard more about the flag raising and read about it, I think I must have seen the original where they just put up a flag and the boats made all the noise. We didn't know what was going on. Suddenly, we looked back and it was about a mile back from the front line. We looked back and saw the people on top of (Mount) Suribachi. I thought I hope its our guys! That's all I thought about and apparently a couple hours later they did the famous Rosenthal shot.

It was symbolic. I didn't know that was a famous photograph until months later. I think I was two to three years back home before I realized what an impact the thing really had. It was a sensation. It was a perfect thing. People considered that the end of the battle and everything but it wasn't the end of the battle. It had nothing to do with the end of the battle but it was symbolism that counted.

Q: So, how long were you on Iwo?

A: About a month.

Q: About a month?

A: I celebrated my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday on Iwo – a very mild celebration (laughs)

Q: You didn't get a cake.

A: No, no. They kept me alive. It was funny. The way it turned out, I think this is true for a lot of people there. I could have went ashore on Iwo or any of the others carrying a six pack of beer and a ukulele and would have done just as good. I spent the war being a "shootee" not a "shooter". Like in the war movies, there was no firefights going on where you're shooting a guy's aim. I never saw anybody aim. They weren't there. You just had to aim at caves or you had to send the flamethrowers in. You had to protect the flamethrowers while they went in or the flamethrower tanks or what have you. You didn't see the people.

Q: Were snipers a problem?

A: Snipers would have been the smallest problem. A sniper's going to make a small hole. I was worried about the big holes in me! It was very weird the whole thing. I don't know if there's ever been other wars like that but that was pretty much how our war went.

Q: So, Iwo, you're there a month.

A: Then they took us back and the same routine again back to Maui and we were probably I know we were supposed to go into the invasion of Japan probably early the next year.

Q: Any thought?

A: No. None at all about that. I got a little break they sent two people who had been in the division awhile over to temporary duty working in Pearl Harbor. I worked there for a couple of months and that's where I was when the war actually ended.

Q: Where were you when you heard the atomic bomb...?

A: That's where I was. I was on guard duty in this tank camp, prisoner of war camp in Pearl Harbor on Ford Island. Not much reaction. We were no place that anybody celebrated. People who were celebrating that you see in a newsreel were people that never been anyplace. They wouldn't be sitting around in Times Square if they had been in a war.

Q: Right. Any thoughts on the dropping of the bomb? Did you think about it at that point?

A: At the time, I was very happy that it had happened because I could just visualize what an invasion of Japan would be and comparing it. They would have fought for every little village in the whole island. I have had a lot of thoughts on it later. I realize it was a decision and you can't quarrel with (unclear). I sort of wondered why they ever dropped the second- the Nagasaki one. That never to me made any sense at all.

Q: So, there's VJ Day. What's your career like after that in the service?



A: Very short. After about a couple of weeks, they brought us back to the camp again with the regular unit. Then, the ones who that been with the division for any length of time (tape cuts)

They brought us back on an escort carrier to San Diego. We were then brought back up to Camp Pendleton. We were there a few days and then broke up. There was no...they sent those who had enlisted up north were sent up to Bainbridge for discharge. They send the others to San Diego. So, when we broke up after all this time together there was nothing. Nobody said goodbye. I never said goodbye to any of the people I was with. I was by myself. I didn't know anybody when I was going through the discharge.

After three days at Bainbridge, I caught a train up to New York. The only one meeting me at Penn Station was some bum. I got the early train and that was it. That was the end of my war.

Q: Were you happy to be home?

A: Yes. Sure.

Q: What was the first thing you did when you got home? Anything you were looking forward to doing?

A: Not really. No. I'll tell you, I didn't have a very active social life before and I didn't really have a lot of friends. Most of my friends were also in the service in other services. I never really talked too much about it. They shared a lot of that type of thing.

Q: Did you go to work right away?

A: Two months, I went to work for the New York Telephone Company. I was with them for twenty five years. Then I went to AT&T and retired from AT&T.

Q: So, you look back at your career in the service, any general impressions or thoughts?

A: The war years, they shaped my whole life. My whole life. Just again, I think I was able to accept things better. I could put things and people in perspective much better. Items that might upset other people, I could roll with more for better or for worse. I didn't have the drive maybe of a lot of other people. Whatever my life became, it was shaped by those years completely.

Q: Any regrets about going into the service?

A: No, I'm glad. It's a satisfaction I guess knowing that you can put up with things and were able to accept it and didn't do anything to be ashamed of.

Q: Have you attended any reunions?

A: Back in 1950, I went in New York for one reason. I haven't been to any of the others. It would still help to go but I don't travel much and its fewer people that I would know. Of course, they're dropping off but it was an experience.

Q: Any last comments?

A: Not really. No. I enjoyed talking to you. I like to talk about it when somebody wants to hear it. I don't like to be an old soldier.

Q: Is it therapeutic for you to talk about it?

A: I don't think I ever had any psychiatric type problems associated with being in a war.

Q: You just did your job?

A: That's right and I really didn't develop many profound thoughts when I was in there. It was just life. It was the way the ball had bounced in my life. For the first time, I was with more people. I had more...I came from a small town and I never had a lot of people to associate with and suddenly I am living with these people for long periods of time and I've got to say it was kind of enjoyable.

I saw things that are history now. On that little teeny island I had my ten minutes of fame with no fame (laughs)

Q: Thank you very much Al, this was a great interview. We really appreciate you...

A: I think it's a very good job that you are doing here. It's well organized.