

Art LaPorte

18 year old machine gunner

Iwo Jima



Matthew Rozell: So let me state for the record that, your name is Art LaPorte, you were born September 16, 1926, so you are probably 72. You went into the service in '43 to '46 then in '48 to '52 over in Korea, I assume. Then in the U.S. Marine Corps you reached the rank of Sergeant. Your training was mainly on machine guns, you said. What did you do with them?

Art LaPorte: Started out as an ammo carrier, you work your way up to assistant gunner, gunner, then squad leader. I would have been a section leader had I stayed a little longer.

MR: Now what is the difference between a squad leader and a section leader?

AL: Squad leader would be one squad, section leader would be two squads.

MR: How many men are in a squad?

AL: Around 6 or 7.

MR: At Iwo, what was your capacity there?

AL: I was an ammo carrier.



MR: An ammo carrier. For what, what kind of ammo are we talking about?

AL: For the machine gun, belt, you carry 1 in each hand. And 250 rounds in each belt containing 1 in each

canister and can. So you're carrying 500 rounds for the machine gun.

MR: What kind of machine gun was it?

AL: It was a [30 Caliber Browning machine gun](#). 30 Caliber, what you'd call a light, the heavy ones are Browning also but they were water-cooled, quite heavy you only use that in the defensive position. The machine gun weighed 39 pounds; the big ones weighed almost 60. See, the way you work it, the gunner carries the tripod, and the assistant gunner carries the gun. So when you move the gun forward, you run, you throw the tripod out so it lands in the right position, then the gunner comes up and puts the spindle down into the tripod, and inserts the belt, then you pull the handle back twice and you're all set to shoot it.

MR: Where did you train, do you remember?

AL: I was at Parris Island, that's where my boot camp was. Then I went a little, what they call Tent City near camp Le Jeune. We lived in huts there for a while, then we transferred out to California. To a little base called Linda Vista near San Diego. It wasn't a permanent base it was just for wartime. Then we were transferred out to Pearl Harbor, they put me in MP outfit and transferred me to Maui. Of course I didn't want to be an MP so as soon as the Fourth Division got back from Saipan and Tinian, I transferred to the fourth division Fourth Division. They had been looking for volunteers because they lost so many men at Saipan and Tinian. Then we stayed there for awhile, of course you are always on maneuvers.

After I joined the Fourth Division, we went on a maneuver in the desert area, then into the jungle area on Maui. There were 2 different areas, on one it rained all the time, the other was as dry as the desert. Of course, you're always using machine guns, practicing with it, throwing grenades, shooting the rifle. So you keep in training for that, guard duty, map reading (which I hated). You go on long hikes, 20-mile hikes are a normal thing. That's why I never went out top of that mountain with the volcano on it. I never went up to see it, I'd had enough hiking on it.

MR: So where did you go when you shipped out of there?

AL: We went to Pearl, we were getting ready to go to Iwo. So we went to Pearl, they stocked up at Pearl. I'm guessing we stayed there for a week or 2. Then we headed for Iwo, a whole bunch of ships joined us.

MR: This was 1945 then?

AL: It was 1945. I stayed in Maui from '44 to '45 saw my 18th birthday there. I was about 18 ½ when I actually went to Iwo.

MR: Pretty young.

AL: Yes, we had 17 year olds come in, but they won't allow that now. Gotta be at least 18 to go into combat.

MR: Were they legally in the service at that time?

AL: Yes, I went in at 17, the only thing is they don't want them that young to go into combat.

MR: But they did go then?

AL: Yes, they did then. They've changed the rules since. It was a good idea.

MR: Do you remember, I guess they told you that you were heading for Iwo Jima, what did they tell you? Did you know it was going to be so heavily fortified?

AL: Well they did not, the Japs had been fortifying that island for 40 years. But we did not know it would be that bad a deal, we were told it would be a 4-day deal.

MR: Now when you say prepared it for 40 years, what do you mean?

AL: Digging tunnels, it was about 4 or 5 floors down, all connected by tunnels. All kinds of bunkers by the dozens maybe even hundreds. So they had the island well prepared for an assault.

MR: So they had been preparing for this moment for years and years before World War II?

AL: We had to have the island because our planes were flying from Saipan to Japan and on the way the planes from Iwo were intercepting our planes, and knocking them out of the sky, I think they were getting bombed at Saipan once in a while, planes would come in probably from Iwo. If a plane had motor trouble they would dig a ditch, and lose the crew maybe and lose the plane. So it was important to take Iwo.

MR: So you had a stepping stone?

AL: Yes, they said it would only be a 4-day deal, then we were supposed to help them out at Okinawa. But of course it ended up 30 some-odd days.

MR: Now didn't it get shelled and bombed quite a bit before you guys landed?

AL: Oh, they pounded it quite a while before we got there. I think we lost an aircraft carrier off that to. And of the ships, they pounded the hell out of it, but the trouble was the enemy was down below were safe. You couldn't touch them. Oh they knocked out some of the bunkers they could hit on the surface.

MR: Navy guns and marine pilots.

AL: Navy guns yes, and the Marine pilots. I suppose they had Naval pilots too. They had what they call Corsairs and they were a beautiful blue plane, propeller driven. They had rockets on them, napalm, well equipped with machine guns, 50 caliber machine guns. And they provided us a lot of air-cover on Iwo, but they couldn't do much about the caves.

We didn't realize these caves were interconnected, till we though we knocked some out then you go by them and on to the next ones. And suddenly the Japs were firing at you from the rear, and picking off your men. So then we figured we had to blow the caves in. The only way you could blow them in was with a [satchel charge](#). Very much like a pack a kid might carry now taking his books to school. Loaded with TNT, they didn't have C2, they didn't have those plastic explosives. It was dynamite. I don't know if they had C2 or not, I don't think I saw any. It was very dangerous work, when you get up close enough to throw the satchel charge in, then you pull the thing and run like heck. But the trouble was when you were trying to approach that cave or bunker or whatever, there might be another dozen {caves from which} the Japs are from trying to pick you off. That's why we lost so many men. Almost 1/3 of those men who went ashore at Iwo, we lost them. Wounded or killed, that's quite a lot of men to lose.

MR: I mean they knew it wasn't going to be easy.

AL: The Japs- there were 2 different figures for how many they lost. We took prisoners there were 25 thousand that died, but over 100, we took prisoner. I think a lot of them were Korean laborers, they were forced labor.

Art LaPorte: Iwo Jima Part II

Art LaPorte: (looking through diary) [Yes, this is my diary.](#)

Matthew Rozell: (looking at Japanese notes) This has got Japanese spellings. (Reading from the notes): “Come out, don’t be afraid, it isn’t dangerous, we will not shoot, we give food, raise your hands, take off your clothes”; why would you say that?

AL: Well, make sure they didn’t have weapons.

MR: Oh. (Reading from the notes): “Be quiet, sit down, stand up, move out-march, where are the soldiers, are there any others in the cave” Did you ever have a chance to say that?

AL: No, no. Didn’t get close enough to talk to them.

MR (reading): “Stop, halt, son of a bitch.”

AL (laughing): This is where I was keeping track of my time in Korea (shows a pocket size calendar).

MR: The days, huh?

AL: Yes, I wish I’d kept more in the diary. I wish I’d kept a diary all the way through.

MR: You said you had one but it got destroyed, didn’t you?

AL: I had two small ones that went before this, and they got messed up with the moisture and stuff. And then, I don’t know what happened to my original notes from Iwo; I had a closet full of stuff that disappeared.

MR: Oh really?

AL: At home there, they didn't take care of it.

MR: Was it that the Japs just didn't surrender, or what?

AL: No, they didn't surrender. The marines, I know I saw one there and I said to my buddy, "are they that big"? He was huge, a good 6 foot, and I was expecting to see little tiny guys. But they were marines, possibly. Jap marines.

MR: Were they dead when you saw them, or prisoner?

AL: Yes, they were dead. I started to search them, but then I thought better of it because they can booby-trap the bodies.

MR: And you were searching them for what?

AL: For souvenirs.

MR: Yes, and you showed me this, it's a coin (shows coin).

AL: Well that one there, I think I was able to bring the pocket out. Usually, if there's any resistance, you don't fool around.

MR: They might be booby-trapped?

AL: Yes, even our own bodies can be booby-trapped.

MR: So they booby-trapped American U.S. Marines?

AL: Oh yes.

MR: That's terrible.

AL: I didn't see any of this at Iwo, but what the Japs had was a trick where they'd have the machine gun strapped too their back, and some kind of weapon and they'd come up pretending they were going to give up. Then one would kneel down, and the other one would start manning the gun. That was a favorite trick. Another trick was they would have the grenades under their arms and you would have them raise their arms and the grenades would fall to the ground. They used tricks like that.

MR: So they knew they were going to die. It's hard to fight an enemy like that, isn't it?

AL: There were a bunch of school kids -I didn't see them, I don't know why I'd of recognized them as school kids. I guess they were visiting, they got caught there and they all died there.

MR: Japanese school children?

AL: Yes, probably teenagers you know.

MR: Was it an airbase for the Japanese?

AL: Yes it was an airbase. They had one main airfield and they had another on and a third one they were working on. That was where I got wounded on, the one they were working on the unfinished airfield. They had Mt. Suribachi, the highest peak, which the Fifth Division took. We had the next highest peak, which was Hill 382 -you name them by height on that one. The day I got hit, my company went against it, they lost half of the men and had to pull back.

MR: How many men were in your company?

AL: Usually a little over a hundred, probably. Wait a minute, let me revise that. I think we figured about 50 men to a platoon, then there would be three platoons plus a machine gun. So it could be over 200.

MR: How many days were you actually on there before you got wounded?

AL: Twelve days, I got nailed. I went on Feb. 19, got hit on March 2 very early in the morning. First thing when we were getting ready to jump off against 382. It was honeycombed with dozens of bunkers and caves and stuff on Hill 382. So they had an awful time trying to take it. An outfit tried to take it before we were there, and they got pretty well wiped out.

MR: Did your outfit take it?

AL: I don't know if they did or not, because I never see anything in writing. They probably went back to the beach and had to get reinforced because, as I say, they lose half the men there. The Japs had tanks, but they didn't use them as tanks. They buried them up to the "turret" and used them as bunkers. I don't think they wanted to go against us tank to tank. Our tanks took an awful beating; they got hung up in the sandy [volcanic] ash there. And the mortars and artillery would lay in on them and wipe them out. I watched one day on the side of the cliffs and they were just one after another getting wiped out.

MR: Just kind of getting stuck in the ash?

AL: Yes, they couldn't maneuver.

MR: Was it black?

AL: It was hard to walk in when we hit the beach; it was sort of black, you know like regular sand. And another thing you had to worry about, you'd see yellow, it was the sulfur. A lot of guys got burnt.

MR: Just the natural sulfur in the ground?

AL: From the volcano you would look down toward the water and it would be steaming.

MR: It must have been hot down in the Japanese bunkers.

AL: I didn't really notice it too much. The nights were awful cold. The days were warm and the nights were cold. There was no cloud cover. Rain was a problem in combat like that you would have your head down and the rain would be coming up in your foxhole.

MR: While you were in your foxhole?

AL: Yes. We had a guy in our platoon that he could see at night I don't know what it was about his eyes but he could pick off {Japs} that were trying to sneak up on us at night. We didn't know what to think the next morning we would see the {bodies} on the ground. He had eyes like a cat. He could see in the dark.

MR: Good guy to have around?

AL: Yes. Our job when we went in is to go straight to airfield. It was a huge beach there, about a mile long. We headed straight to the airbase and they called us back and it was our job to take the cliffs to the right and the bunkers in them. The Navy had already taken them which was lucky for us they had pretty heavy guns. I think I took one of the sights and gave it to the hospital ship.

MR: The sight of the Japanese guns?

AL: Yes.

MR: So you went into the bunkers?

AL: We walked right through the bunkers it was the only way to the other side. What was funny was there was a motorcycle there I believed it was on our motorcycles from maybe back in the 30's it all shot up I thought that was quite a funny sight.

MR: Japanese having American motorcycles to get around?

AL: Yes, then there was a road that went over a culvert and then some Japs tried to hide in the culvert. We tried to talk them out and they would shoot at us, so we end up, I think we shot in there, and I don't know, we might have thrown a grenade in there. And then we called in a flamethrower and that finished them off.

MR: Oh really.

AL: Yes, if the flamethrower didn't get them, then lack of oxygen would collapse their lungs.

MR: Oh, I see.

AL: So it kills them pretty fast.

MR: So you had to call that in you say?

AL: Yes, you have the flamethrower with you all the time, just like the machine guns are with the platoon. On it, it was one job that I don't think that I wanted.

MR: Why not?

AL: All I could think of was the bullet hit the right place in those things and they'd probably explode. I never saw any do that.

MR: What did they have in the tanks, was it like "napalm" or something?

AL: I don't know what the combination, I suppose; I think it was a double tank and it was probably like your "suddling" or something. They had tanks that had flamethrowers, but I never saw them in action. When you see pictures in Iwo, you do see those flamethrower attacks, but I never saw them. There was a shack up there, once we got over the top, we kind of had to go easy, we didn't know if they were booby-trapped or not, and luckily it wasn't. And there was all kind of like books showing pin-ups, they had those in Japanese. Pretty girls, pretty Japanese girls. Then there was a low table, they sit on the floor, they didn't have chairs. And I believe it was made of "teak" wood, a long low table. And I said to my buddy, 'boy, that's worth a lot of money if you had it'. There was a lot of stuff in there in one shack. But we didn't dare to fool around too much with anything because we were afraid of booby traps.

MR: Were they dead in there?

AL: No, I don't think there were any bodies in there, I think they cleared out on it. The airplanes did a job on that.

MR: Well, I was reading one of the stories, you were saying, it was about the souvenir hunter went in?

AL: Yes, in the caves there. They were down below the cliffs. We moved down below the cliffs to neutralize. I guess we had to go to aid another company down there. Between the cliffs and the water. They had, well, it was like a horseshoe in there, and the ships couldn't help us there firing because they were blocked by the terrain. So the company went in and tried to knock out the pillboxes, and bunkers, and caves. And they got pretty beat up. So we had to go to there aid. And one of our men went in the cave there, apparently souvenir hunting, a very foolish move because I wouldn't have wanted to go in one of them caves like that. And his buddy came along, he thought, you know, he didn't know his buddy was in there, and the guy comes out, and his buddy thought he was a Japs, and shot him right between the eyes. So then, of course, he cracked up. And we lost two men on a very foolish deal.

MR: Was he in your platoon or squad?

AL: In the company, yes. We were all moving up together in that situation.

One of the flamethrowers blasted into the cave and apparently it was storage for airplane fuel. The flames went the cliff about a hundred feet. We ran like rabbits from there. One guy threw down gear and rifle and took off for the beach. The flames died right down and there wasn't much fuel in there. When we went to drag him back to his Sergeant really chewed him out for throwing his rifle down like that. We all got a laugh out of that.

I almost stepped on a grenade. I think it was a gas cylinder that the Japanese had, if they wanted to use gas on us. We marked it so no one would step on it. I imagine if it busted it would turn into vapors and be poisonous. So we had to worry about things like that.

MR: (Reading from Art's personal memoirs) So I'm reading here that you actually saw a Japanese making a motion to you.

AL: No, we were on top, I was a little back, as an ammo carrier you didn't stay right up on the line, there wasn't that much room. And, there was a little piece of land jutting out so I went out to see what I could see in front of our men. And the Jap, I could see from the waist up, he was giving a motion like there was Americans on the other side to somebody, and apparently they were going to get ready to throw grenades or something. And so I didn't trust the "carbine", it was not a very good weapon, especially if the Jap was "sakied" [drunk on rice wine, saki] or drugged up. So, I called one of the guys over that had a M-1, they were a pretty heavy caliber. And, he wouldn't believe it at first that there was a Jap that close, it was only a few feet away. And we were behind bushes, and the Jap didn't spot us. So I say 1,2,3, and we'll drop him. So I counted 1,2,3 and we both shot him. I shot twice, he shot once, and the Jap sort of swerved sideways, so we got him. And we alerted the guy up front, he ran and alerted the guys to watch out, so they threw the grenades over, and no more trouble on that.

MR: Gees, if you hadn't been looking, it would have been the end of the story right?

AL: Yes, they probably would have been throwing grenades on that, but they didn't get a chance to do that. Or they might have "bonzai-ed" even.

MR: What's that?

AL: I only saw one "bonzai" when I was there at night. The Japs will get up and charge and they would be hollering "bonzai". I guess, "die for the emperor", or something. I don't know what it means. They try to over run your line but it didn't amount to much. A lot of them try to swim around and get you from the back, but the Navy took care of them out in the ocean, destroyers. Near the end of the battles, long after I had left, they did make a "bonzai" charge in the daylight and our troops mowed them down, that shortened the battle.

MR: That was on Iwo?

AL: Yes, if they had come out like that all the time it would have been a shorter battle, but they stayed in their caves, which cost us a lot of men going into the caves after them.

MR: So do you remember what it was like when you got hit?

AL: I was kind of in a shallow place, I was going to run up and join my outfit they were a little ahead. I was getting ready to join them because we were getting ready to move out. All of a sudden the sniper was putting shot right by my head. I could almost feel it. They were so directed it would have hurt your ears. He wasn't hitting me; he was firing by my head, so I figured I better run so I zigzag. Of course if you zigzag you make yourself a harder target. Next thing I know I'm flying through the air, a machine gun had gone by me and they were using explosive bullets. And, so luckily I landed in a 5" shell hole. Our guns on the destroyers were 5" in diameter across the shell, like the battlewagons has 16" diameter across that shell. That weighs a ton. So I looked down at my leg, because I realized the leg had been hit, and I could see the bone, and you could out your fist into it. And just above it was a graze on the muscle, and that's all I noticed at the time. So then I think I could hear some guys in the next 16" shell hole, so I think I hollered over to them, "I'm hit". Or they hollered over to me and asked if I was hit. I wasn't feeling any pain, I was in shock. As bad as it is, it was no pain that I remember. And so I heard somebody running and somebody popped down on me, and the machine gun was trying to get him, and it was my Sergeant, section leader. And he says, "How bad you hit?" and I said "Pretty bad." Well, he saw the graze on the upper part, and says, "Aw, that's just a scratch!" and I said, "Take a look below." And he let out a thing there, and I think he said "Jesus" and he ran into the 16" hole, and some more running. And this time another body landed on me and it was a core man this time. And he tried to patch me up, but that machine gun kept trying to pick his arm. So he says, "I can't work on you

here, I haven't got room enough" because it was very shallow. And he said, "Would you take a chance? We can push you across to the 16" hole." It was a short distance, maybe 10 feet. I said, "Sure, I got to get patched up." So he pushed against my good leg and I'm trying to crawl. And the other guys in the 16" hole are reaching out for me. And one of them got a graze against the wrist.

AL: He was lying in the hospital later and he showed me the graze he got trying to help me. So they helped me down into the 16" hole the machine was firing all the time he wasn't a very good shot. I know if I had someone in that position like that I would have got him. Then they got me down in the hole-it was pretty deep, probably six or eight feet deep. Quite wide too. They worked on me, patched me up. Then they left; they had to go to Hill 382. So all day I was there I tried to drink water, but I couldn't, I'd throw it up, tried to eat food, same thing. I noticed a funny sensation, like something wet. I knew that they had bound up the wounds good. I was worried about hemorrhaging, so I pulled up my pants leg and there was a fountain about an inch or two high coming out of my kneecap. A piece of shrapnel had gone in and hit an artery or whatever is in there. I had used my bandage on my wounds, the only thing I had was toilet paper. So I put that on with some pressure and it stopped the bleeding.

MR: So is that shrapnel something you got after they left?

AL: No, I got the shrapnel at the same time I got the bullet.

MR: But it wasn't bleeding when they patched up the other one?

AL: Not that they noticed, there was a lot of blood anyways on my leg. I didn't feel nay pain. Of course, they shove morphine in you, and that pretty well numbs you. Then you're in such shock. I would say that I didn't really have any pain until I started healing.

MR: So when you noticed that other wound was hemorrhaging, or bleeding on you, were you by yourself?

AL: I was by myself in the foxhole, I was all alone. I looked back toward, there we some rocks back there, and some of our men were there, and stretcher-bearers, but they didn't dare send anyone because there were so many bullets flying around.

MR: The machine gun was still going?

AL: And they didn't want to lose four men to save one, yes. Well, all kinds of weapons were firing there because they were trying to pick our men off. My company was going against 382. And of course I was right in line with it. I'd peep up and try to see how they were doing, but I didn't dare to stand up on my good leg. I

didn't want to put pressure on it and it shakes.

MR: What, your arm?

AL: Arm, yes.

MR: Still?

AL: Yes, well, you see that all blown away from that? (shows scars on arm) That was from Korea.

MR: When you were in the hole, how long did you stay there?

AL: I'd say about eight hours.

MR: Then it got dark?

AL: I was quite concerned it was getting there. They start out right at daylight. You have long daylight. I heard firing start to pick up a lot going by me, people were going by me. I was concerned that they would go back to the rocks and leave me there and the gooks would get me. My sergeant came by and asked if I was still there, I don't know how he got me out of that 16" hole but he pulled me out. He asked me if I could stand on the good leg. I said yes so he put me in a fireman's carry and carried me out under fire.

MR: How much did you weigh then?

AL: Probably 135 or 145. When we moved into that position an awful thing happened as I say the outfit that was there had gotten pretty badly beaten. We got there and it was dark you could still see they probably had searchlights from ships. So they hollered for us to get into a foxhole, it was getting light out. So I started into a foxhole, could see the guy's legs, I followed his body up. I was going to tell him I was going to share his foxhole. I followed his body up, everything seemed normal. I said in my story there that I thought he got shot off, but I think probably that a Japanese officer got him with his samurai sword. Just chopped his head off.

MR: Why would he do that?

AL: Well, you know, to kill him, probably snuck up on him.

MR: The officer carried a sword like that?

AL: Yes, they carried their swords. One of our guys found one of those swords, and it had jewels in it, it was a good one. And I said to him, "You still got your sword?" Well, he buried it and was planning to go back for it, which I would never let that sword get away from me.

MR: How would you carry that during battle though?

AL: Well, you could use the same belt they did. In fact, that would have been a good souvenir too. And he buried it, and I often wonder, because people were coming along with their metal detectors. So I imagine someone got a nice easy souvenir, and didn't have too duck bullets to get it. It's too bad. Another incident that happened, one of the guys got a hari-kari knife, it looked just like a block of wood.

MR: The ones they would use to commit suicide?

AL: Yes, so one of my buddies got one from Saipan or tinian off a Jap. So he had showed it to me. So he said, on my way to Iwo, "When we get back to Maui, the Hawaiian Islands, would you like that?" And I said, "Don't you want to keep it?" "No," he says. "I'll give it to you." I said, "Sure." So of course I never got it.

MR: Who carried those? The officers, all of them, or what?

AL: The officers, because they're the ones that would commit hairy cairy. If they dishonored themselves, better than giving up. The general that was in command, that's what he did, he committed hari-kari.

MR: Right there?

AL: Yes, in one of the caves.

MR: So how long did the battle go on for?

AL: I think it was something like 32 days.

MR: And it was only supposed to take 3 or 4?

AL: It was only supposed to take 3 or 4, and then we were supposed to help them if they needed it on Okinawa. We had the 3rd, 4th, and 5th on Iwo and the 1st, 2nd, and 6th was taking Okinawa.

MR: They didn't have it easy there.

AL: They walked in I guess, but they had it tough after that. Places like Naha, the capital of Okinawa. A general that I served under, he was the one that went in and took Naha there, I suppose with the First Division. He used to tell us a lot about how tough the battle there had been. They had some bad hills there; you know you could get in trouble on it.

MR: Those were the stepping-stones towards the end, right?

AL: Oh yes. You should see that sea out there loaded with ships, all kinds. The destroyers, when we had a chance, we would sit there maybe waiting, a lull in the battle or something. We watched the destroyer and he was making on some targets there. And you see they have 5" guns on the front too, the destroyer escort has 5" in the front and the back. Well, the destroyer has two in the front and one in the back. So he was coming in towards the shore with both of those guns opening up. And I swore he was going right up on the beach, he was so close. Then he'd turn the ship around, and then as they pull away, the rear gun was going. I said to my buddy, it reminds me of a hornet, the way he was attacking there. What a sight.

MR: It's good to have those.

AL: Yes. Those, well, you didn't get much sleep. You never get much sleep in any combat, like Korea. You're lucky to get two hours of sleep in you're in actual combat with the enemy. That sleep is not too good because your pretty shook up. To make it worse, the shells on the battlewagons weighed a ton, 2,000 pounds. When they exploded you would actually be lifted off the ground several inches. So I did a lot of cussing at the Navy for keeping me awake.

Mt. Suribachi was quite a sight too. There, for a while, you could watch that going on. They put spotlights on

it at night and they were pounding with everything they had. They put 20mm, 20mm, and 5inch guns, the 16s, they were really pounding it. I don't know if it did any good, the {Japs} had the caves. They were really working it over.

MR: When did the flag go up?

AL: About the forth day.

MR: So were you there?

AL: I didn't actually see the flag go up. We were pretty far inland by that time, from the cliffs. I volunteered a guy to go and get some food for the platoon. As we approached the cliffs I looked over and I saw the flag flying. I said to my buddy, not knowing that it would become so famous, I said, "What the devil do they have that thing flying for?" only I used some different language. Oh wait, I said, "What in the devil do they have that thing flying for, we haven't even taken this piece of..."that was when I used the language. Yes, that was it; you should show them {your students} the print. I have it hanging here. (Shows picture frame with a picture of American soldiers hoisting up the American flag, a poem written by him, and a picture of him in his army uniform). They wanted volunteers to be a machine gunner, but the thing was that you couldn't be home for a week, you went overseas. And that was around Christmas time, so I elected to come home. And some did volunteer to be gunners. They probably went to Saipan, Tinian. That picture (in the frame) was taken when I was home. And my parents were working in a factory in Schenectady, General Electric, and that's where I had the picture taken, in the photo studios down there. That was before I ever got any good medals. (Referring to himself in the picture)

MR: Yeah, you're not wearing any there.

AL: No, I'm wearing my pseudo-silver, that's what they call boot camp medals. Grenades and shooting and whatever.

MR: So when you got wounded, did they ship you right out?

AL: The sergeant carried me back to the ranks, and they put me on a stretcher. I believe they had a jeep. I don't know if you saw pictures where they put stretchers on the jeep. I believe that's what they put me on because they had a road that went around the cliffs. And you had to drive around the cliffs. Now we had rockets going off. They were something new then. And there were a lot of rockets flying around out heads.

MR: Who was firing these?

AL: Our people, and when they got me down to the bottom of the cliffs, they were rockets there.

MR: So they were launching them from there?

AL: Yes, they had those tubes, 30 or 40. And they were launching them from there, and there was a whole bunch of us laying there waiting to be transferred down to the beach, and put on a landing craft. Talking about rockets, the Japs had a huge one, it was like an airplane and I guess they would fire it from the cave or something. Most went over Mt. Suribachi into the ocean, which was lucky for us.

After I was taken out, one landed near our people. It buried them, actually buried them, the explosion was so big. Our people had to unbury them before they suffocated. Anyways, from the position below the cliffs I imagine they loaded me onto the jeep and took'em down. You had the same aircraft you came in on to carry the wounded out. It was full of wounded. Had a guy that had completely cracked up. He had gone insane, they had to put him in a straight jacket. He was really gone. They got us to the ship, the hospital ship. I don't know how they got us aboard. I do remember the bunks though. The guy next to me had gotten an infection in his leg. He had gotten gangrene. I was lucky I had not gotten it down in the hole there. Down in the heat all day, the heat was really bearing down on it. So anyways, they took him away; when he came back he was missing the leg from the knee down.

They say when you lose a leg you may still feel it. I guess he didn't know he was missing it when he came to he went to feel it, I guess feeling pain, and he realized it wasn't there. He went right out of his head, yelling and screaming. From where I was I could watch the doctors operate. It was a table and around the table was a trough. What fascinated me was when the trough was filled with blood, and when the ship would rock, the blood would go back and forth.

They finally got to me and I believe I said to the doctor, "I've got a good one for you, Doc". Because the one that was ahead of me apparently couldn't take the pain too good. And he was screaming and hollering and I could see the doctor. They were right around the clock, and they looked awful tired. And I said, well, to myself, I'm not going to give them a hard time, they had enough trouble. So when I got to him, I watched him there, it really didn't bother me. I could see him clipping with scissors around the wound taking the jagged edges off.

MR: They had you on morphine then?

AL: Yes, I don't know if the same morphine was working or if they had time enough to put more in me. But I was conscience and watching them work on the leg and I didn't feel any pain. I didn't give them no trouble. Then when I got done, they put me out on the side where I could look out and see Iwo, like a sundeck or

something. That was the last time I saw Iwo- we sailed for Guam. One thing that happened on the ship that wasn't very good when was I had to go to the bathroom. So the core man brings crutches and said, "Well, go." Well, I had never been on crutches before and with the roll of the ship, of course I went right on the leg, an awful pain then. And I did feel the pain then. I almost passed out. So after that, they didn't try to get me to go. I went on crutches one I was on solid land. A strange thing, on the ship there I knew I was safe on the ship, but after what I had been through, I'd come out of a nightmare. I'd have one and I'd look around. I still could see all the other people in their beds and stuff. But I still had the feeling that I'd look under my bed and there would be a Jap there and he was going to come out and kill me. And that was the feeling I had from that.

MR: Do you still get nightmares today?

AL: I've had a nightmare down through the years. I haven't had them lately. When I worked

n Finch Pruyn {paper mill} sometimes I would be working on something and I would go back in the battles and I could almost smell the gunpowder. I would see all the action for a few seconds. If you had waved your hand in front of me I would not have known you were there. I was right back there. That's what happened to the guys in Vietnam. That doesn't happen any more. I've gotten to where I don't mind war movies anymore. They say that Ryan movie is bad; it probably wouldn't bother me anyways.

MR: "Saving Private Ryan", have you seen it?

AL: No. I did quite a bit of drinking when I got back like most everyone else. I didn't become an alcoholic, thank goodness. I found out that drinking doesn't make you forget; it actually makes you remember, so that isn't the answer. I think time tempered it, you still think about your buddies and how they were killed. I had this one buddy in Maui, we were good buddies and we were in this fight over a little nothing. You know, like teenagers do. He got the better of me, I had to go to the sickbay, I had two black eyes and a bad nose, and in fact I think he broke my nose. And I could lick him in a free-for-all, in fact when the fight started, I pinned him down and then when we stood up, he said I was a dirty fighter. So then I stood up and fought like he wanted me to, which was a mistake. But we stayed buddies, and on Iwo, I was coming back off the cliffs, we had lost half the companies by then, and he was just moving up, never been up there before. It was only a few days, maybe 5 days. And I warned him what to look out for, any booby traps, and how to look out for himself there. And we had quite a conversation, then I had to move out, and he had to move out, and a few days later, I saw his outfit, and I says, well, where is so-and -so, I forget his name now, he was from Albany, and I asked them. He was caught up in a mine and a sniper got him right between the eyes. So he never suffered a bit, he was dead before he hit the ground. I thought I'd go on and talk to his family. And hindsight now, I should have, I should have went and said that he never suffered, which would have been a nice thing to tell them. But at the time I couldn't do it.

MR: That's hard, really hard.

AL: Yes, the funny thing was I found out afterwards, I guess he did a little boxing in the ring, amateur, and I was throwing roundhouses, so that's why he got the better of me. (laughs)

MR: It's got to be hard to lose you friends like that.

AL: Yes, yes. We got back to rest there a buddy of mine and I decided to go to the artillery down on the beach. There was really no safe place on Iwo. It was only four miles long so any gun could reach anywhere. So their guys weren't any safer than we were. They were probably in more danger than we were because they were trying to take back the artillery and the supplies. When we started back we saw several hundred men from the fifth division lying on the ground. They were getting ready to bury them. It was a sad sight.

MR: Yeah it must have been sad. I suppose that you have never been back there, have you?

AL: No, I haven't. A lot of people have been back. I thought of going back, I guess the Japs don't really want you there. On the 40th anniversary they weren't hospitable.

MR: They weren't hospitable then either?

AL: Well, yes, they welcomed us.

MR: Yes, sure they did, but how do you feel about the Japanese people now?

AL: I had no hate for them-I had no hate towards any enemy that I fought. I fought Koreans, Japanese, Chinese, Russians, I never had any hate. The way I figured it, they put up a good fight. They were fighting for their reasons. We had our reasons. They put up a good fight when the battle was over, we treated them good. We didn't treat them bad. But when we got to Japan, we were on our way to Korea, I got to talk to one that had been on Iwo. We were talking about Iwo, what it was like there, and everything and I felt no bitterness to him.

MR: That was probably six or seven years later?

AL: Yes, '45 and that was '51.

MR: He spoke English then.

AL: Oh yes, he could speak pretty good English. There are certain words they can't say. So we had words for, you know, the password when you would come back from the line that you'd use, they usually couldn't say them. Yeah, he could speak pretty good English, not too bad. Same way in Korea, we had men there that were interpreters for us, and they could speak very good English.

MR: They learn that in school probably too.

Well, I'm going to close it now, Art, because I have to go pick up my kids. But I want to come back, and someday, get the Korean one too, because I know there is a lot more too.

AL: Yes, okay. The guy next door, Tom Mailey was at Anzio Beach. That might be interesting if you can get him to talk.

MR: He doesn't want to talk?

AL: Oh, I think he would like to talk, but I don't know if he would like to do something like that. That was a tough one, Anzio Beach.

MR: Yes, I'd like to talk to him.

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interview originally recorded in October 1998.

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