Frank R. Pusatere
Veteran

Michael Aikey
Interviewer

Wayne Clarke
Videographer

August 22, 2001
Latham, New York Headquarters

Frank Pusatere **FP**
Michael Aikey **MA**
Unidentified Veteran **UV**

MA: We're interviewing Mr. Frank R. Pusatere. It's August 22, 2001 and we're at the Latham Headquarters. Michael Aikey, Interviewer; Wayne Clarke, Videographer. Mr. Pusatere, where were you born?

FP: Troy, New York.

MA: Did you grow up in Troy?

FP: Yup.

MA: Went to school in Troy?

FP: Went to school in Troy.

MA: All the way… did you go to Troy High?

FP: No, I quit in eighth grade. And then I went back to school when went into the Arsenal. Got a GED.

MA: Did you join the National Guard at all?

FP: Yes.

MA: When did you join it?

FP: September the 21st, 1940, three weeks before it went away, or before we got federalized.

MA: Why did you decide to join the Guard?

FP: Because I knew we were going to be federalized, and I knew we were going to Alabama. And everybody said what a beautiful place Alabama was—romantic, have a good time. I was all for it.

MA: Ah, this is going to be that kind of interview, isn't it? You enlisted in the Guard, there up at the 15th Street Armory?

FP: Yeah.

MA: What was that like?

FP: I didn't spend much time up there. After we got federalized, they kept a lot of guys. I don't know how I did it, but I got to go home and go to bed, sleep in my own house. For the weeks from the day we got federalized to the day we got on a train to Alabama, I went home every night. Most of the other people slept on the bunks or on the floor up there.

MA: Now, you were in the 105th.... what company?

FP: Company D.

MA: So, you got federalized and they decided to send you off to lovely Alabama.

FP: Right, Fort McClellan, Alabama.

MA: What was the trip down like?

FP: Two days on a train.

MA: Was this your first time away from home?

FP: Basically, yes, for more than a couple of days.

MA: But you were amongst friends?

FP: Well, I knew a lot of people. That's one of the reasons why I joined.

MA: So you had a two-day train ride. What did you think of Alabama when you arrived?

FP: Lousy! It was cold at night and hot during the day.

MA: So what was basic training like?

FP: I never had basic training.

MA: You never had basic training?

FP: No, it was the National Guard, and a friend of mine told me that when they asked whoever had training, step forward, and I stepped forward. Because they had close order drill for eight weeks, I think it was. And they said they told me. I didn't even know what close order drill was, and they told me, "You wouldn't like it." And they were right.

MA: So what did you do down in Alabama?

FP: Within two months I became the bugler. Nobody wanted the job, and this captain, Wally Veneer [?], had a very, very persuasive way. He put his arm around me and he asked me. I said "No, I don't want to be." Because I heard it was kind of tough. So he put his arm around me—he was a big tall guy—he said "Frank, do me a favor, will you? Take it until the other guy gets better." And I said all right. But the other guy never

got better. But the job got better. No more basic training. We had some sergeant from headquarters come to give us basic training. After about a week, he went back to his old outfit and nobody took care of us. So we went and practiced an hour a day and did what we wanted to do. When we learned, we had to be with the band, though. In the morning and the change of guard, which was a snap.

MA: Did you become a pretty good bugler?

FP: I would say. Fair to middling. Not real good, but good enough to pass.

MA: What did you think of Alabama?

FP: We had a lot of fun. I was young, I was 18. Went out and drank a lot, caroused a lot. I liked it.

MA: What did you think of the South in general?

FP: They were awful stiff in the beginning, and they loosened up. You know what loosened them up? Money. When we weren't spending any money in town they all did everything in their power to bring us back.

MA: So you went on maneuvers—

FP: In Tennessee, was the first maneuvers. We had six weeks of maneuvers in the red clay of Tennessee.

MA: What was that like?

FP: Lousy. A lot of walking. The food—we ate on the run most of the time, and the Louisiana, Mississippi, maneuvers were a lot worse. They were longer, dirtier. You can imagine, you take a shower with a canteen.

MA: Any incidents you can recall in those maneuvers?

FP: No, just that we walked a hundred and fifteen miles in three days once. We ate breakfast in the dark and we ate supper in the dark, and they gave us Spam sandwiches for lunch.

MA: Now one question I tend to ask anyone I meet from Troy is, does the name Mame Fay ring a bell?

FP: Mame Fay? Now wait a minute now. I think she…. (laughs) of course it does! She was the biggest madam in the whole country! No matter where I went, I said Troy, and people said Mame Fay. California, Alabama, Texas, no matter where I went. Couldn't believe it.

MA: Where did she have her business?

FP: You know where the police station is, in Troy? That block.

MA: Oh, interesting.

FP: I met her. I don't remember how.

MA: That's ok. Do you remember where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

FP: Yeah, I was on guard duty. I was bugler at the guard that day, and somebody said, "They just bombed Pearl Harbor." And everybody said, "What's a Pearl Harbor?" Nobody ever heard of it.

MA: And what happened the next day?

FP: That night, we moved out. The next day we were in— What's the day of it again?

MA: Pearl Harbor was December 7.

FP: That night we moved out. We moved out at ten o'clock at night. They told us to be prepared to move out at an hour's notice, and 8 or 9 o'clock at night they said we're moving. Guntersville Dam.

MA: And you went and guarded the dam?

FP: For five days.

MA: What was that like?

FP: Just walking guard duty.

MA: Do you recall hearing the term "OHIO"? What does that mean?

FP: Home something—

MA: Over the hill in October.

FP: Oh yeah, over the hill in October (smiles).

MA: What did you think about that?

FP: Oh, that was a joke.

MA: After guarding the dam, what did you all do?

FP: We came back to Fort McClellan and got ready to move out. In four days we moved out to California.

MA: What was the train ride like?

FP: Oh boy, crowded. C rations. They fed us C rations. You had four people in the seats, you couldn't sleep. You gambled most of the time to pass the time. It took five days. They stopped the train every day so you could walk back and forth and get a little exercise.

MA: Once you arrived in California, what did you do?

FP: We did guard duty on March Field.

MA: How long were you in California?

FP: Three months. We had six weeks in Fort Ord and six weeks in Camp Haan.

MA: Now were you training all that time, or just guarding?

FP: Mostly guarding. We didn't start training until we hit Hawaii.

MA: What was it like on the trip over to Hawaii?

FP: Lousy. We were on an English ship with Australian crew. And the food was out of this world–not far enough out–it was lousy. Everybody complained, nobody could eat. They had a bakery on the ship, and that's the only thing… we ate bread, and they served oranges with every meal.

MA: How did you get along with the Australian crew?

FP: Not good. Not bad, but we didn't have much to do with them.

MA: So you finally arrived in Hawaii. What was that like?

FP: Wonderful. We went to town when we could. It was something new. We saw all the girls, Oriental girls. We never saw Oriental girls [before then], or very, very seldom. You got to think back, it was 1940—there wasn't many Orientals around this area.

MA: Now where in Hawaii were you?

FP: We went to Oahu, the big island of Hawaii first.

MA: What were you doing there?

FP: Did a lot of amphibious training.

MA: What type of quarters did you have?

FP: We moved about every five or six weeks, seven weeks. We were in all different kinds. The first time we were in Pahoa, and we occupied a gym right across the street from the school. Everybody loved it because they threw a lot of parties for us, the Hawaiian people. Or the natives, I should say, because there were a lot of Orientals mixed in.

MA: What were your duties, besides bugling? Or was that it?

FP: No, I became a radio operator. In Hawaii I went to school to be a radio operator. That was my primary duty.

MA: So you trained in Hawaii for about how long?

FP: We stayed in Hawaii nine months, I think, and then we went to the main island of Oahu.

MA: What was that like?

FP: About the same. We did a lot of training, a lot of guard duty.

MA: Any recreation?

FP: Oh sure, we had the Bowl. We used to go… there was plays, there was wrestling, there was boxing when you could get tickets.

MA: Any events or instances that stick out in your mind during your stay there?

FP: Just that we were always broke. Never had enough money. (Smiles)

MA: When you had to go overseas, when was that, do you remember?

FP: You mean when we went to Hawaii?

MA: No, after that.

FP: When we went into combat? How was it?

MA: Well, do you remember when it was? Was it 1944?

FP: It was in '44. It was in June. We boarded the ships, probably,…

MA: Was there much notice?

FP: There were rumors. We boarded the ships probably twelve days before that, maybe early in June, 1st, 2nd, 3rd of June.

MA: Did you know where you were going?

FP: Not then, no. We knew we were going to fight someplace, but we didn't know where. They told us Truc, but that was a rumor. We went to Saipan.

MA: What was life aboard ship like, going over to Saipan?

FP: Real bad.

MA: Why is that?

FP: The bunks were this far apart (gestures with his hands about a foot in distance), the food was lousy, and the sun was hot.

MA: What were the latrines like aboard ship?

FP: Not good. Adequate, but not good.

MA: When you first arrived off of Saipan, by that time you knew where you were going—

FP: Oh yeah, we knew about the third or fourth day out.

MA: Did you make any preparations for landing? Were there any intelligence briefings?

FP: Oh yeah, they briefed us a lot.

MA: What did they, basically, tell you?

FP: They told us we were going to get on Higgins boats and make a landing, but we never did. We never made the landing. The landing was already made when we went in. We went in two days later.

MA: Did they give you any idea of what you'd be facing?

FP: Not really, no.

MA: So you're off at Saipan. Two days after the initial landing you went in.

FP: We went in, in ducks.

MA: So was it pretty uneventful, going in?

FP: Until we got in, and then we took the airfield.

MA: What was that like? Was that your first experience--?

FP: We saw a lot of dead people.

MA: What was going through your mind then?

FP: Nothing, really. You've got to realize that you're awful hardened to it, with all the training you did. It bothered some guys, but it didn't bother me.

MA: So you were a radio operator. Working with who?

FP: My CO, he was a lieutenant.

MA: And who was that?

FP: It was Tommy Rine.

MA: What kind of guy was he like?

FP: I liked him, but I think I was the only guy that liked him.

MA: As a radio operator, what did you do?

FP: I radioed for the 81 mm mortars; when they used to fire their 81mm mortars, we'd get back if they're over or under.

MA: So he was a forward observer? So you were right up front?

FP: I was up front all the time, yeah. My company was always up front.

MA: The fight at the airfield, it was pretty sharp?

FP: The airfield was mild, compared to later on.

MA: What did you think of Saipan? Initially, your first few days.

FP: You really didn't think about it. All you thought about was staying alive. You didn't bathe, you didn't shave. What you ate was, we had C rations.

MA: What's in a typical C ration?

FP: Beans, hash, and cookies – not cookies, hardtack, hard biscuits.

MA: What did you think in general of the C rations?

FP: They were lousy. Everybody else was getting K or 10-in-1 rations, but we were eating C rations. I don't understand why we got C rations.

MA: After the fight for the airfield, where did the company go?

FP: We kept advancing.

MA: So you were basically going up the middle of the island at this point?

FP: Yeah.

MA: What was the terrain like?

FP: Island terrain. On one side was mountains, the other side was the ocean.

MA: So you were between two Marine units?

FP: No. The Second Marine Division landed on the other end of the island, and they got stopped at Garapan. The whole time on the island we were fighting they were stopped at Garapan. The Fourth Marine Division was on the top of the mountain, or on the side of the mountain. We come up between them and the ocean, basically.

MA: What was the fighting like in general, once you get beyond the airfield?

FP: When someone's shooting at you, it's never good.

MA: As a radioman, you were fairly exposed?

FP: Yes. I got my radio hit a couple of times. We bivouacked on the side of a hill. This is one of the reasons why nobody liked Lt. Rine. He bivouacked us on the side of a hill and in the morning we woke up and there was all kinds of snipers up in the hill, and they were firing at us, and my radio got hit a couple of times. It didn't hit the radio, it hit the backpack, and I wasn't too far away. But I wasn't right there.

MA: That's one thing that they didn't like about the Lieutenant?

FP: Because he bivouacked us there and he shouldn't have. He made a mistake.

MA: You continued to move forward. Did you ever see many Marines?

FP: Very, very few.

MA: Now, by the time…. The banzai charge, that was later on?

FP: That was July 7th.

MA: Where were you when that happened?

FP: On the front lines with my company.

MA: Were you still radio operator at that point?

FP: I was on the front lines, but I was in the middle of our own perimeter.

MA: Let's see, that was early morning. Can you remember the day before, anything going on?

FP: Yes, the day before we bivouacked, they had tanks strategically placed, and every three or four minutes this tank

would fire, and that tank would fire. I said, "What a beautiful safe spot we have!" That was the day before; the next day, we didn't have nobody.

MA: The tanks left?

FP: Yeah, I don't know where they went.

MA: Was this a fairly new position that you were in, the day before?

FP: Every day, every night was a new position.

MA: So the day before, the tanks were there, seemingly a good position, and then the next morning—

FP: They were gone.

MA: Can you remember how the morning began?

FP: Which morning, the 7th?

MA: The 7th.

FP: Yes, I can remember distinctly. I heard 300-400 people running back toward me, saying "We ran out of ammunition." And when they got to me, if you look up far enough you could see Japs, and they were firing at us.

MA: So what's going through your mind at this point?

FP: Run like hell, like everybody else. But we weren't running, we were executing a strategic withdrawal (smiles).

MA: Ok, I understand. So the whole line, at this point it's not even a line, is it?

FP: No.

MA: The whole group is just moving back. What were you armed with?

FP: I had a carbine.

MA: So you could see the Japanese—

FP: Right. I ran back and jumped in a foxhole with one of the companies of the Second Battalion, and they had a light machine gun. They didn't know what was going on. I said, "There are Japs out there, start firing!" So I fired a clip of my round, and they fired the machine gun, and then the foxhole got covered with fire from the Japs, and we had to lay low. And then after that happened, they stopped, and they picked up and ran back.

MA: So they evacuated that position, the machine gun team?

FP: Yeah, evacuated, that's a good word (smiles).

MA: And you thought it was best to go with them?

FP: I didn't want to get left alone. Which I did, though, later on. We ran back, maybe a hundred yards, and there was a long trench. It wasn't a man-made trench, it was like a hollow dugout. And I jumped in there and I fired fifteen rounds from my carbine, and then I looked to the left and to the right and nobody was there. I figured everybody was going to stay there. And that's when I got wounded.

MA: About how close was the enemy at that point?

FP: About two blocks away.

MA: At this point, there was really no organized defense?

FP: There wasn't any organized defense all day long.

MA: So it was just a moving battle. You got wounded by rifle fire?

FP: No, a knee mortar.

MA: What happened when you got wounded?

FP: I put my hands to my face, I fell to my knees, and I start saying my prayers, and a medic came up. I don't know where he came from. I remember the guy's name, Rosie. He bandaged me and took me back and then somebody else came and helped him, and I got back to the beach. And a friend of mine, I've been with him all my life, I asked him to help me—I could hardly talk—and he says, "Who is it?" He didn't know who I was. My face was all like that (gestures with his hands about 6 inches on either side of his face). I laid on the beach all day long, and probably about midnight they came and got us from the ocean with ducks.

MA: Was there fire on the beach?

FP: Some. But it didn't bother me, though. Because I was bad… somebody gave me a shot, and I didn't feel it. I knew what was going on, but I didn't feel anything.

MA: So they evacuated you that evening?

FP: Yeah, around midnight.

MA: Where did they take you?

FP: To a field hospital.

MA: On Saipan?

FP: Yeah. They put me under a truck on a stretcher and that's where I stayed all night long. And they came about noontime the next day and put me on a hospital ship.

MA: How was the care at the field hospital?

FP: There wasn't any care. No one even looked at me.

MA: Really? So what's going through your mind at that point?

FP: Nothing. I was pretty much out of it. I could remember everything that happened, but nothing bothered me.

MA: So they removed you to a hospital ship?

FP: Yeah.

MA: How long were you on the hospital ship?

FP: Well, we went from Saipan to New Caledonia, fifteen days.

MA: How was the care on board the hospital ship?

FP: Lousy. It took them three days to look at me.

MA: Really? Now, had you heard what had happened on Saipan? Did you have a sense of what took place?

FP: Well I heard that later on, but not then, later on.

MA: How long were you in the hospital?

FP: At that time, a little over a year. I got wounded July 7th. I got discharged July 19th of the following year.

MA: Did they send you stateside to a hospital?

FP: Yes, they sent me to Cushing General Hospital in Framingham, Mass.

MA: What was that like?

FP: Beautiful. Country club.

MA: Did any other Saipan—

FP: I'm the only guy I knew there from Saipan.

MA: The care there was good?

FP: Yes, very good.

MA: Do you have any other remembrances of the action on Saipan?

FP: Not really. Just that it was kind of miserable. You were dirty, you were tired all the time, because I was carrying like 60-65 pounds. My radio weighed 38-1/2 pounds. And all of the grenades and ammunition, so when it came time to leave the foxhole, I was really beat.

MA: You were discharged out from the hospital?

FP: From the hospital, yeah, medical discharge.

MA: And what did you do then?

FP: I went back to work. I came back to Troy. The war was still going on. Germany surrendered, but Japan was still active.

MA: Any fanfare when you came home?

FP: Oh no, I was coming home every weekend. Oh you mean when I came home from— Yeah, all my family came up to see me, which is165 miles or so from here.

MA: Ok. So after your discharge you went directly back to work?

FP: I stayed out for six weeks or so. My father kept asking me "When are you going back to work?" We had a produce business in Troy, and he kept asking me when am I going to go to work.

MA: So did you finally go to work with your dad? How long did you do that?

FP: Well, I was a partner. Until I got out. I got out in 1947. I worked 2-1/2 years or so.

MA: And then what did you do?

FP: I opened up my own business.

MA: What kind of business?

FP: A fruit stand.

MA: Ok. Whereabouts?

FP: 109th Street and 5th Avenue. Are you familiar with Troy?

MA: Yes.

FP: You know where Ken Goewey has his Dodge vans?

MA: Yes.

FP: That was my fruit stand.

MA: Oh, very nice. What are your general impressions of your military experience?

FP: I only remember the good parts, I don't remember the bad parts. And there were a lot of bad parts, but I don't remember them. I don't want to remember them.

MA: Was it a worthwhile experience, in general?

FP: Hmm…. It taught me a lot.

MA: What did it teach you?

FP: How to get along in life. How to interact with people.

MA: A good lesson. Any other stories you can think of?

FP: Nope, that's about it. Unless you want to talk about me and your boss [apparently another man who was in the room during the interview] vying for each girl's attention or something (laughs)?

MA: I've heard about that…. But your training was good training for the job?

FP: Oh yeah. We didn't like it, but it was good training for the job.

MA: How was the equipment?

FP: Adequate. Of course, this is 1944. My SCR 300 I carried, if it carried a mile it was a lot; you got static after a mile.

MA: It was susceptible to topographic conditions?

FP: Yeah. And so were the little hand ones we had. If they carried two or three blocks, it was good. I can't remember the name of them, but we had handheld ones too.

MA: Now during the banzai attack, was there any radio communication?

FP: My radio got hit early in the morning.

MA: So you were basically just fighting to survive at that point?

FP: That's it.

MA: Can you think of any incidents that were memorable during that period?

FP: No.

MA: Just a lot of angry people trying to kill you?

FP: Absolutely. And we were trying to kill them.

MA: Anything you remember about the Japanese?

FP: I went out with a lot of Japanese girls in Hawaii. (Smiles) They were all nice. We learned some Japanese.

MA: Well, thank you very much, sir.

FP: Ok, Mike.

MA: My pleasure.

[Tape ends, and then resumes mid-sentence, with Mr. Pusatere standing now:]

FP: --and an airplane come by, and everybody, must have been 5000 people shot at it. Machine guns… I shot at it with my rifle. We got it.

MA: Did you get credit for it?

FP: No.

UV: Excuse me, I want to ask a question. Did anybody ever mention the weapons the Japanese had?

FP: 25 calibres?

UV: Not really. You see, the Japanese rifle was a 30.1--
[Camera moves to the man speaking]

FP: No, they had 25 calibres.

UV: --They could use our ammunition, but we could not use their ammunition.

A different unidentified person: Yeah, I've heard that before. I read about that.

UV: Yes, that's a fact.

MA: Was that called the Arisaka?

UV: I don't know any of the nomenclature, but I do know that for a fact. They could use our ammo. And the funny thing is—you must recall this—during the night when there was infiltrations and things of that nature, remember in the morning, we were called back to get down to the mainline defense so we could rest, and then the following day when we got back again we'd see our cans of rations had holes punched in them?

FP: Rest?

UV: Our rations, the cans?

FP: You guys got pulled back to rest? What was that like? We were never pulled back.

UV: Oh yeah, we fell back to different positions so we weren't out in the clear all night. We went back to the tree line. That's not retreating, we were just going back to a defensive position, that's what we used to do. But did you ever see our cans of key rations with bayonet holes in them?

FP: No.

UV: You didn't see that? Well, the Japs didn't want our food. (Laughs)

MA: I would like to get a bunch of you guys together. I think that, just the interaction would be interesting. You might remind each other of things you may have forgotten. Any chance to put that together?

UV: It'd be kind of interesting, I can guarantee you that. It's a darned shame that [unclear]….

MA: See if you can work something out, maybe in the next month or so.

UV: Well, maybe this guy— (points toward another veteran sitting near him, and camera moves briefly to that man]

Other veteran: I'll work on it.

MA: Frank, we've got a little paperwork here. This is a release form which gives the interview to us. If you have any restrictions….

[Tape ends]