

**Lawrence M. Pinto
Veteran**

**Joseph Gambino
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Interviewers**

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Q: Mr. Pinto, what branches of service were you in?

LMP: I was in the Marine Corps, Joe. The United States Marine Corps.

Q: When did you enter the Marine Corps?

LMP: I entered the Marine Corps back in March 10th, 1943.

Q: Were you drafted or did volunteer?

LMP: No, I was seventeen at the time. I enlisted.

Q: Do you find anything special over enlisted than drafting?

LMP: Yes, you have your choice. At that time, you have your choice of the service you wanted when you enlisted. If not, if you waited until you were drafted, you could have been put into the Marines, Navy, Army, Coast Guard; whatever. Whatever is needed at that particular time?

Q: What interested you in the U.S. Marine Corps?

LMP: It was back in the middle 30's, there was a young man next to me, he lived next door to me. Who was at that time attending Holbrook High School and when he graduated, he went off to join the Marines in the middle 30's and he was in there at that time. The marine Corps was six months and he was having a hard time. He stayed and he did come home with a group of Marines off one of the cruises that had pulled into New York and he looked like a million dollars. The three of them were dressed in their blues and I fell in love with the Marine Corps at that point. That was the middle 30's and then as went on this far I'm talking about, stayed in the Marine Corps went all the way and became a full colonel and retired as a full colonel for the National Safe Marine.

Q: What wars, theaters, campaigns, or locations were you in?

LMP: I was a Pacific Campaign. The Pacific Area they called it. The Pacific Theaters. In campaigns I was in Saipan in June of 1944 and then back to Hawaii for reorganization and then Montague, Wajima on February 19th, 1945. I returned to Saipan, reorganized, and was on the invasion of Okinawa on April 1st, 1945.

Q: What were your general duties skills or rating?

LMP: In the beginning, they sent me to school and training for an aircraft gunner which consisted of having to learn how to be a radio operator, both voice and code. They sent

me to Texas A&M College for that and then we are back to Cherry Point, North Carolina. We were organized into a unit that was to support division with a radar system. We were the eyes of the division and on a site pane, that's exactly what we do. We stay with the Division Headquarters and we gave them the notice when their aircraft were coming in bombing that night. After that, we were reorganized and we went into what they call Landing Force Air Support Control Unit. This unit was made up of officers who were pilots and enlisted people like myself. What we did was we controlled air strikes from the land with the units. We were attached to the divisions and we would support them in the air fire. Just like artillery, we use their planes and that continued onto Iow Jima and then we reorganized and we were onto the same thing in Okinawa.

Q: Did you have any combat service?

LMP: All three. All three services Joe. It was Saipan was combat, Iow Jima was combat and. It was all first landings first state you recall it that way.

Q: Were you, at any time, under fire?

LMP: Absolutely, every time. All day, every minute we were on the island, we were under fire.

Q: What were your feelings as you were in this war in this combat?

LMP: We thought that, see Joe, at that time we were only 18 and 19 years old. Nobody could kill us. We just kept going. We saw a lot of death, but we didn't think we were going to get it. Some of us did and some of us didn't. That's something we'll never be able to figure out!

Q: What was your daily life consisting of?

LMP: Well, when we enlisted the Marine Corps, we had to go down to New York City. We had to go down to Church Street where we took a physical. The physical consisted with whatever they do to get you in. I almost didn't make it because the fact that I found out at the end of the physical that I had flat feet. Third-degree flat feet, but with the doctors looking at it and everything else, I finally made it. Then we made it down to Paris Island. We picked up from New York going down, picked up a contingent of fellas from Philadelphia and I think also in Baltimore and that comprised us of opportunity as we got down there. *Chuckles* It was very discouraging because when we got off the train, there was a DI standing out there with his smoking stove of a hat and his raincoat and we are standing in the pouring rain and he's giving us a lecture. Of how good we are, how proud we should be to be coming in and joining this unit and organization. We were treated like cattle until we got in and then from that point on it became very hard training for the eight weeks that we were there. That's all we got out of boot camp, eight weeks and on way to the next plateau. They didn't have time to give us any more than that, very interesting. Then, they (as I said) sent me to school. They sent down to Texas A&M, which was a great duty place. I loved the college. Matter of fact, they even let us go out for the football team, but the association down there changed that quickly. When we had that back way back and then I started it and then we took off for San Diego and then we were put on the aircraft carrier, The Wasp that sent us over to Hawaii. Now when we arrived there in Hawaii, (I hope you fellas studied geography well because I always thought Hawaii was flat and I was amazed to see the mountains in Hawaii. I

thought they were just flat with a lot of palm trees) we were there and that's how we started. From that point, that was our home base, Joe. We stayed in Hawaii, we made The Operation of Saipan, we brought back prisoners from Saipan, and then from that point on we reorganized went to Iwo right from Hawaii. Then from Iwo back to Saipan (because Saipan was supposed to be safe, but there was still some fire there still from Japs that didn't think that the war was over. From there, we went, and we made the invasion on Okinawa, on just Sunday in 1945. We finished that, came back to Hawaii and while we were in Hawaii, we heard that the war was going to end within the next four or five days and we didn't believe it, but what happened Joe, was they dropped the atomic bomb. That started the whole process of war being ended.

Q: What were your reactions to using the atomic bomb?

LMP: That didn't have a reaction because we didn't know what the heck it was really, we had no idea what it was, really. That only came later on when we found out how bad it was, but all we knew was the war was over, so that all we cared about. We were on our way home. We took off and headed back for San Francisco with two days out of San Francisco when the Japanese surrender. There was such a celebration in San Francisco that when we arrived in San Francisco they wouldn't let us in San Francisco. They kept us on a little island called Treasure Island which is right underneath the bridge between San Francisco and Oakland. We were such under there, we couldn't get out. They put us on a train, sent us down to San Diego. They wouldn't let us off the train. Then we got down there, they separated us, and some fellows came to the East Coast and some fellows on the West Coast. I was lucky to have to stay in the West Coast. I mean that I paid my way home and back, but when I was stationed, they put me in a place called El Central, California. It's right in the boarder (over some of the boarder) it's about 30 miles from Mexicali which was a Mexican side. I was there for about eight months. We stayed there and we kept going and we did a lot of things. I wanted to organize the band and we played in the nightclub at night. It worked out very nice. Then, we all hitchhiked home in December of 1945. That was it. Left the Marine Corps in December 1945. After that, in 1949, I joined the Army Reserve.

Q: How would you say your equipment fared during the war?

LMP: Very good. It was very good. Compared to today, it's not as good, but then it was fine.

Q: Compared to the enemies, how would you say it was?

LMP: Oh, it was quiet fine, we were superior. It took us a little time Joe, to get there. I was fortunate enough to be in that area where we had the good stuff. Prior to that, you go back to the Gwata Canal, Wake Island. We didn't have the equipment. We weren't ready. Matter of fact, we didn't even have a Navy. All we had was pretty smashed out. If it wasn't for the aircraft carriers. Wake Island was the saver that saved us in the large Pacific if they hadn't taken away Atoll, I think we would've been in trouble. We have been talking Japanese today, very possible.

Q: What was your unit you or share?

LMP: The Landing Force Air Support Control, United States Marine Corps.

Q: How did you feel with your officers?

LMP: Very well. Very good. We got along very very well.

Q: Was there any regular discussions with them daily?

LMP: Oh yeah, sure. Matter of fact, we were in San Diego, we were getting ready to move out. One of the officers we had, a lieutenant, was a pitcher for the Philadelphia, Phillies. We were planning two supplements outside; we were playing game and he's pitching. He wasn't pitching very hard and he threw me a nice... well I hit the darn thing and it went over the center fielder's head and it hit the break ground. It rolled for miles and I ran all-around for a homerun. I'm jumping up and down, saying I hit a homerun of a major league ballplayer! Ha ha ha, what a deal right? I got up the next time and I didn't see the ball. He showed me! He goes to the side; throws it a good time and it was a good thing. Another good thing we did, believe it or not Joe, we made the invasion on Okinawa. The Marine Corps landed and then we went north instead of the North portion that was up in the mountain area. We were supposed to hold up there, but the Marines move so damn fast that we secured that it no time. Now we had to move south and as the city of Naha, that's where we had a hit. We had the Marine divisions right across with the army divisions, fighting south. In that little bit of break we had before we went south, we put on our minstrel show.

Q: Can you explain that?

LMP: Yes, we got stuck together, we made black face, and all kinds of things. We had a little show for the guys for about one day and then we broke it up and moved down south non-stop, but it was a little break in the action. You see it's not all fighting all the time and then we had to go through rain. Tremendous amounts of rain that bogged down the vehicles. You couldn't walk in the mud. It was so deep and so thick. You couldn't get your vehicles out it was so bad. That lasted a couple of days. After we left Okinawa, we were out of the area by typhoon. This typhoon tore places apart. We lost a lot of ships. That's another thing, we had a witness an awful lot of Navy ships going down and being hit by Kamikaze Airplanes. They teach you the instructions to these fellas and tell them to fly the plane, but they don't tell them how to land it, so all they do it tell them how to crash into a ship and we lost an awful lot of sailors, Navy guys imperially fighting, it was terrible. I hate to say this fellas, but if we hadn't gone to Japan, I swear we would've lost a million men, easy. If that was the case, I would be sitting here talking to you guys. I'll tell you that right now. It wouldn't never happened, so anybody that says, should we have dropped the atomic bomb, I said well as far as I'm concerned, yes. I would say, I wouldn't be sitting here telling you anything. Terrible Swants.

Q: How would you celebrate the holidays while you were at war?

LMP: The best way we could. If we were on the islands, we'd try to put trees together in front of everything if it were Christmas time. You see what it was, I think they've made a couple of movies called the brothers or the brotherhood. It's exactly what it is. You're so close to the guys, it's so close, and you just roll with the guys in it. That's why were so close today. Were that close, were Band of Brothers since we were in the mountains. It's a whole thing. I wouldn't want anybody to go through it, but it was the experience was fantastic. Very fantastic. We had to do something. We were told we had three

people; Mussolini, Adolf Hitler, and Pancho. They were trying to take over the country- this country. They were trying to take this country away from us and they would do anything they possible could to get it and we didn't want them to take it. We stood tall and we said they are not going to take it! We were like you guys; we were all in school and all of a sudden, this thing happened, and we all had to leave. Matter of fact, I was here. I was here in this school in 1941. I was a student and I had just gone up with a friend of mine (he was in school) and we had gone up to see Sister Bernadette up at St. Dominic's, Norte Dame that Sunday and then coming back. We received the news that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor and destroyed three quarters of our fleet. Then we came to school and we were all sitting right her in Shamarot thinking, what's going to happen next and then of course, a lot of fellas that have graduated from the school or already in the army and we had a lot of heroes.

Q: How would you contact your family during the holidays? Would you write letters? Send cards?

LMP: The only communication we had was a small paper where we could write it, but it had to be examined. The officers in the unit would read the letters which wasn't that greatest idea. I mean somebody else in another unit maybe was reading your letter didn't know who it was from Adam, but our own officers were reading our mail. Not so bad with us because the officers and – we got along very well, but when you even thought of another unit, an infantry unit or something like that, you would cut out what he thought could be used, so by the time the Pan family got the little piece of mail it was about this big (*very small*) and it had all holes, so they had to read it and try to figure out what it had said. I had a key with my dad. I used to tell him that “okay dad, I got things are popping and I don't know what's gonna happen, but I can't write to you for a while” and that would key him into soon as we get to an island or some invasion, he knew exactly where I was and that's it. When I came home, he showed me a picture of Iwo Jima. The flag came later, that's five days later. That was a spectacle. We had five solid days on an island. We couldn't get on an island. We were having trouble getting on an island because the black ash that was supposedly sand, but wasn't sand, had no bottom to it. It was volcano ash and sulfur burning just coming out of the ground, so your vehicles would sink into that sand and you couldn't get out. You had to get towed out. You'd try to walk in it like walking in a silo of wheat. You can't do it, or you try to dig a hole in the silo of the wheat. What's gonna happen? The more you push it besides; the more wheat comes inside the hole, so that was tough there. Then this mountain is sitting on the other side loaded with four to five hundred Japanese firing at us constantly. Until one day it stopped. The fifth day for some reason we didn't get any more firing from the battle was still going of the left. It's quiet, so we sent a group of guys up there. They climbed up that side of that mountain because there's no roads no trails and we didn't know if they were gonna make it or not. It took them about three quarters of an hour to get up there and when they got out there that's where they could see the island, boy the Founder of Beauty. Now they know what the Japanese were doing was for the last five days. Then eventually they had that flag, guys when that flag went up, I tell ya. It was the greatest thing. It was only five minutes, but for those five minutes all the ships out in the water, they were blowing their horns and everybody was yelling, screaming, and yelling. It was like we kicked a field goal. We won the ball game, but the fighting hadn't stopped. The sad part of it is six guys in that picture. Five were

Marines and one was in the Navy Corpsman. Later on, three of the Marines in that picture was killed on the island later on, brought up towards the north, so they never did see the picture and didn't realize what happened. The other three came back, back here to the states and they did some barn storming and they are gone now. Those three guys are gone. One way an Indian. By the name of Hayes. It was a tough battle. We made it.

Q: It says you left the corps in 1945. What did you do then?

LMP: Well I did a little schooling and then I married, had some kids, play a little football which I loved. I played a semi pro ball and then someone talked me into joining the National Guard. At that time, the military police and I switched over to the National Guard over to the reserves. I stayed with the reserves for a total of the years of service came to 38 years. I then retired in 1985 as Command Sargent Major and now I'm on a pension.

Q: Did you receive any decorations, metals, or commendations for your services?

LMP: We received the Congressional Presidential Unit Citation on the island, Saipan, the other awards were the Asiatic Pacific metal and of course the American War metal. Then I was recommended for the Navy Unit Citation for the work I did on Okinawa and then later on I received the army reserves the AMA Accommodation and I receive the Meritorious Service Award.

Q: What person do you remember best from your service and why?

LMP: There were so many wonderful things. The Marines with the guys. I had good times, a lot of laughs, had a lot of sadness, but I think our time in Hawaii which I think was one of the best times. We all got together. I still go back there Joe, I still go back to Hawaii because I always felt that Hawaii was the stop it of the Japanese onslaught even though they hit us. That was the place to stop them where we stopped them from getting to Hawaii and it was a big thing. It was very enjoyable.

Q: Did you perform any unusual service or duties during your time?

LMP: No, no I don't think so.

Q: When you finally retired, did you settle down with your family?

LMP: Yep. You wanna know how many? Okay, I had six kids. Three boys and three girls. I now stand at the threshold of 14 grandchildren, one graduated from this school and three great granddaughters and we were married 56 years.

Q: Do you still contact you war buddies today?

LMP: *sighs* I did and most of them are gone, they're gone. Now I've created a new group. I am right now, a member of the First Marine Division Association its all first Marine duty. Right now, we work with the Marines over at Garden City and Stewart Avenue. We help them out on a civilian basis. Anything they can't do, as the colonel puts it, he calls us the Marine extension and it's what we do. If there is some way, we can help them out; in the lawyers or anything that we can help the young people out. We give a picnic every year over the park, we do a Christmas part for all their kids every year, so were pretty active with the Marine Corps. I left the army.

Q: Were you every injured or captured during your experience?

LMP: No, but I knew some people that were though.

Q: Close friends?

LMP: Yeah, it was my son-in-law's uncle. Who was 1939, he was drafted into the army, trained, and sent to the Philippines, captured on Corregidor on the death watch and survived. It was a horror. It was a horror what they did to him. The stories he told me of what they did to our troops, to our guys in the war. They didn't feed them, they didn't give them medical treatment, and it was a disaster.

Q: Did you feel any aggression toward the enemy?

LMP: Now?

Q: Now and back then?

LMP: Well yeah, I don't have lot for the Japanese. I can't. For what they did. I saw what they did. Ill tolerate them, but them it's a new group. I know we've gone back; I know the reason we've gone back. We've got back because of Iwo Jima. They had these sessions with some of the Japanese soldiers that did survive, which wasn't many of them. They do a meet maybe twice I think so far, but I don't think I could do that.

Q: Well, thank you Sergeant Major Lawrence Pinto for sharing your war experiences.

LMP: I appreciate it Joe, thanks very much.

Okay, I wanted to show you here, this is a picture, this is the fall's Antioch put up the first flag of Iwo Jima. This is the top of Mount Suribachi and you can see what they had to climb up all. All this stuff in here and over is where you see them going up with a flag on the side, the guys. Over here, this is where the flag when up and you'll see a Marine here guarding this area because they weren't too sure. After the flag had gone up, the battle was over, we lost three of the original flag raisers and I'll show you on this side of the picture here. In this picture here, there were six men. Five marines and the one corpsman. Eventually, after it went up, the three fellas that didn't survive. There are two pictures of two of the men that did come back later on. They brought them back and this is Ira Hayes and I think this fella down here is one of the fellas from Rene Gordon. He was one of the very guys missing in here and that was the corpsmen. Then they came back. There's a picture here of the lieutenant colonel, Chandler Johnson, sitting on the side of – here this is Suribachi blowing up and they were part of the whole set up and getting that flag up there. Over here is where you can see the actual landings where they took place. Suribachi is here and over here the landings of the green beach, blue beach, and red beach all along here we made these landings, but what we were getting was fire from this mountain which was five hundred and some-odd feet and all they were doing was raking this up and down, up and down on the beach here. Making it very difficult to dig in on the beach and destroying the equipment as it come in. You can see in this shot here, if you can take it you can see how were pinned down on the beach trying to get up these little Knowles up here which was the soft coral sand. That was it that was the most things. Now we gonna cross. Here is a copy of the book with the picture. This is the units that were on the island that took part in the island. You can see the breaking down the unit. Fifth and Amphibious Corps with the units of the

fifth and here is our unit here. Air Support Control Unit. That was the unit I was a part of and then of course you're Third Marine Division, your Fourth Marine Division, your Fifth Marine Division, and you're Seabees who were the guys who built the road up Suribachi later on. We have reunions every year and this is 1998. We took a picture of all of these survivors. All these men were on Iwo Jima and we do this every year. We also put a nice picture of this monument here of the flag raising, right now is at The First Marine District recruiting station over in Garden City and they hold this for us. This is the colonel in charge and the sergeant major and all these men and myself who were all former Marines and also all former Marines that found on Iwo Jima, Fourth and Fifth Division and that a picture of story of Iwo Jima.