

**Joseph P. Fiore  
Veteran**

**Kate Mann  
Interviewer**

**Interviewed on January 13, 2004  
New York State Military Museum  
Glens Falls, New York**

**Q:** Where were you on December 7th 1941?

**JF:** I was on Warren Street in front of a newsroom. There were a lot of old buildings there. There was also a newsstand. The headlines displayed breaking news, "Japs Bomb Pearl Harbor." I looked at Ted, and he looked at me. I beat him to it— I said "where the hell is Pearl Harbor?" Not quite a year later, I learned exactly where Pearl Harbor is because we arrived on a ship. When we entered Pearl Harbor, I'll never forget this, you couldn't hear a thing. The only thing you heard was the swish of the water as the boat was going in. We saw many ships laying on their side. So that's where I was before I ended up in Pearl Harbor. From there, it's another interesting story.

**Q:** Is Pearl Harbor where you went to training?

**JF:** No. I already had trained in the Marine Corps. I went to Paris Island and became a Marine. After graduation, we were discharged and I ended up in Quantico, Virginia and then New River, North Carolina. Those were where I trained until we got to the West Coast, and the last thing we did before we boarded the ship for Pearl Harbor was fire the rifle range. It tuned us up for what was going to happen when we got into combat.

**Q:** Where was your first location of combat?

**JF:** In the Marshall Island campaign. We went aboard a ship for Navy transports with all our gear. We left around the 1st of January 1944. We stayed aboard ship for almost the rest of the year training and in combat. We went back to Hawaii for R&R, which was a training camp to train for the next military action.

**Q:** How did you feel about going into combat in the Pacific?

**JF:** I was scared. I made my first landing in Engebi Island. I was in an amphib with no ramps. We had to go over the side. We jumped, maybe three or four feet from the ground, and all I could think was "when I jump out this thing here, I'm going to be facing the enemy holding a machine gun at me." But when I hit the ground, I looked around and I didn't see nothin'. We had landed just at the end of the runway that we were there to take. We were Island-hopping, and every island we took usually had a

runway for fighter planes. We started walking on the runway, going up to the other end of the island where headquarters were. Three or four of us were talking while we walked. We weren't running because we didn't see the enemy. All of a sudden, I looked down at the ground and said "Jeepers sakes! Look at those little marks there." It looked like Mexican jumping beans! Well, there were Japanese snipers far back, and they were firing, and their bullets were hitting the ground at our feet and we didn't realize it. But when we realized it, we started running. We made it off the island in no-time. Tony Luciano would have been real proud of me because I broke more records than him that day. [Laughter]

**Q:** What went through your mind during combat?

**JF:** Well, being a catholic, we had a priest onboard the ship. We heard confessions onboard the ship. We were up at 4 in the morning. They gave us breakfast which was a steak with three or four eggs on top of it. That was our last meal before we left. So, we made it ashore. We secured the island and spent the night there which was hectic. That's when Japs would try to sneak into our positions, but we had machine gunners covering us. The Navy left a lot of bomb craters—huge 16-inch shells that exploded on the runway— so we got into those big holes on the ground and waited until daylight came. Then they sent us back to our ships out in the harbor to get ready for the next operation. About four days later we went to PERRY Island— that's where I got my first purple heart.

I used a lot of hand grenades in those days. They called me the Pineapple kid. I used 70 hand grenades in one day and one night on that island, blowing up fox holes underneath coconut trees that the Japanese built for themselves. I was working my way up to an installation that I was going to blow-up. My partner from Seymour Drasginski from New York, a Polish Jew, was backing me up when a motor landed at the back of me and I pulled a pin from the grenade. There's a spoon attached to the grenade, and as long as you keep a grip so it doesn't move, you can walk around the island all day long until you're ready to throw it. So, I went down on my stomach, before I knew it, Drasginski jumped on me because he figured I was wounded. Then I found out later that he was also wounded by the same grenade. He really saved my life. He picked the grenade out of my hand and threw it as far as he could. Then he started dragging me by my collar. Sergeant came up on my other side and helped. So between them, they got me out of the area.

A tank was coming up, so they put me in the back of the tank. They got me into the stretcher and got me to the beach. I ended up in the hospital— The USS Solace on my way to Pearl Harbor. I didn't realize I was losing my outfit and I didn't want to lose it. I saw Drasginski one more time later that same year. He told me "Don't forget, when you get to the rocks, look up my mother." I said 'I sure will.' Which I did, but nobody was home and I left a note at the door.

**Q:** Did you go back to Pearl Harbor after you were injured?

**JF:** Yes. The first time I went to Pearl Harbor, I was there for about a month recuperating. I had been shot here and one in here [points to mouth area]. From my ankle to my buttocks was full of shrapnel and that hurt. I didn't realize how much shrapnel I had in me. They got me off the stretcher and they sat me in a metal chair. I went right through the ceiling! It was like sitting on a pin cushion. I said "Hey, I'm not sitting in that chair!" I got back on stretcher and stayed until they had a bed for me [Laughter].

**Q:** Where did you go from there?

**JF:** After I got discharged from the hospital, I went to a transit center to wait for an assignment. At that point in time, another invasion started. They were going to Saipan. Because I lost the outfit, they assigned me to a demolition unit, the Battalion B-118, 2nd Marine Division. That's when I became a flame thrower and used demolitions instead of just hand grenades. I improved until I got hit a second time which was July 2nd. I was on top of a mountain.

Another friend of mine by the name of Steve, from New York, got me back to the battalion. There was a jeep there where they took the seat out and made a stretcher out of it. I happened to be a stretcher patient at that point in time. They strapped me to that thing to take me down the mountain. There was also an ambulatory patient, who was hit in the face and his arm was in a sling. They tied him in the seat. So they had two of us in the Jeep. It took about one hour to get down the mountain because it was turbulent all the way down.

We got to the beach, then back to the hospital. Well, that night, the Japanese bombarded our abandoned radio station that was all concrete. A huge monster of a building with no roof. That night we were bombarded and I started crawling out of my cot. I got on my hands and knees and went toward the stairwell, trying to get out of there. Eventually, the Japanese let up on the invasion.

There was a huge smokestack where the Japanese hid a spotter. The spotter was directing the fire from the mountain, which we took later on. He called his artillery unit, and that's how they found where we were. I thought I was going to get hit again but I didn't.

On the beach I was in a stretcher. It was about 95 degrees in the shade. This big black sailor came up to me. I never seen a man so big in my life. He said to me "Hey Marine, you want a cold drink?" and I gave him a few choice words. He came back with a can of Dole pineapple juice. He said "Come 'on." He knelt down, lifted my head, and gave me a

drink anyway. I said “Holy cow, where did you get this?” He said “Sabey’s over there.” They kept a refrigeration system on the beach to keep stuff cool. I never got the guy’s name.

Then they took me out to the hospital-ship. We ended up in the Russell Islands. We didn’t go back to Pearl Harbor- where they had huge beds and sheets. I was in tough shape for 18 days. I was receiving morphine every 12 hours at noon and midnight. It would wear-off at 10 o’clock right on the dot. I would beg the nurse for another shot, and she would say “no way.”

Finally, I got out of there, back into my outfit. I was back in combat again. I still had a bandage around my leg. For some reason, we were back in the mountains. A jeep came up to me and asked, “Where’s Fiore and Madora?” I said, “Right here.” He said, “Captain wants to see you, get in the Jeep.” The Captain said, “There’s a boat on the harbor down there. You got one hour to get your gear and get down to that boat.” The boat was an Indian boat. I said “What am I gonna do with the other 59 minutes, Captain? I have nothing. No shoes, socks, nothing.”

We got to Pearl Harbor where I came down with malaria. Madora said, “I’m going to take you to the hospital” and I told him, “You’re not taking me to no hospital. I’m going on that boat tomorrow. I’m going back to the states tomorrow! Don’t put me in a hospital.” He said “Okay.” So, we got back to the United States. I ended up in San Diego with a new ID card.

I ended up on a 30-day furlough back in Glens Falls, in the middle of January 1945. From there, Sergeant McClosky came. I was on guard duty. He said to me, “Fiore, you can type right?” and I said “yes, sir.” and he said “Okay. Pack your gear, we’re going in the office. You’ll be working for me.” That was okay with me [laughs].

Thank the lord for Harry Truman. He dropped the bomb on Nacrosaki and Hiroshima, and the rest is history.

**Q:** While you were in Saipan, did you hear anything about the civilian-suicide?

**JF:** Yes. I was onboard a hospital ship at that time. That happened after I left the area. That was tragic. When I got back, they told us what happened. They had Japanese soldiers that were smart enough to know we weren’t as bad as what they were being told. They told them “if an American grabs you, they’ll torture you and kill you. Especially Marines because in order to become a Marine you had to kill your mother or father.” Which was garbage! Those people hated it and they jumped off the cliff. Terrible.

**Q:** How did your parents feel about you going into war?

**JF:** They were proud that I enlisted and went into the Marine Corps. But my mother took it pretty badly when she got the telegram that I was wounded. My sister said “Look mom, he’s alive.” I felt sorry for her once she got notice of the second Purple Heart.

**Q:** Which island was the most intense experience?

**JF:** Saipan! No question about it.

**Q:** If there was one thing you would change about your marine experience, what would it be?

**JF:** Nothing. Marines taught me everything I know— how to survive. I’ll never forget that.

**Q:** Do you have any pleasant recollections about the war?

**JF:** Yes. We had good times. I was stationed in Philadelphia Navy Yard, and I could come home on long-weekends which was called a 72-hour pass. I would come up to Albany or Glens Falls on Saturday morning, and by late Sunday afternoon I would head back to New River.

**Q:** How do you feel about the current wars that are going on today?

**JF:** I hate wars. It’s something we have to do. We’re a free nation. Who am I to say whether we should go or shouldn’t go. I don’t really have an answer for that.

**Q:** Can we discuss the metals you have?

**JF:** The first metal I received was in Pearl Harbor. The second one was printed in a shop in Honolulu. The third medal is the Asiatic Pacific medal— the three stars represent the three islands I fought on. The fourth is a World War II Victory medal. The fifth is a New York State Conspicuous Service cross which represents that I have two Purple Hearts.

**Q:** Anything else you would like to add?

**JF:** When we got home we organized the Marine Corp League in town. We’re 58 years old. We had our chapter in March of 1946 and we’ve been going ever since.

**Q:** Thank you very much for your time.