

**Milton A. Eager
Veteran**

**Michael Russert
Wayne Clarke
Interviewers**

**Newburgh, NY
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I: This is an interview with Milton Eager, the Hampton Inn, Newburgh, NY, January 8, 2003 approximately 4PM. The interviewers are Mike Russert and Wayne Clarke. Could you give me your full name, your date of birth and place of birth, please?

MAE: Milton Arnold Eager. We pronounce it "a-gar," they spell it like "eager."

I: OK.

MAE: The date of birth was May 3, 1925 and I was born in Newburgh.

I: What was your educational background before you entered service?

MAE: About three years of high school and then I was drafted and I had to go into the service.

I: Could you tell me when you heard about Pearl Harbor? Where were you and what was your reaction?

MAE: I was, I think, 17 years old, 16 or 17 years old, about 16 years old. It was 1941 and we were on Route 300 which is this route right out front here. But I was staying with friends, a girlfriend that I had, sitting on the front porch and we had the radio on and we heard that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. Her uncle came out and I asked Ray, Ray Tilford I think his name was, I said, "Ray," I said, "Where is Pearl Harbor?" He said, "I don't know, why?" I said, "Well, the Japanese just bombed Pearl Harbor." So, that's the way I found out about... Of course, I was 16 years old then.

I: Were you drafted or did you enlist?

MAE: I was drafted.

I: What year?

MAE: 1943.

I: All right. Where did you have your basic training? Could you tell us about your basic training - your boot camp experience?

MAE: It was in Spartanburg, NC and was back in 1943. Spartanburg, NC, and we had, I think it was, 13 weeks of basic training and then we had a short leave to come home and from then on, I went to the different bases and everything.

I: What were the relationships like, between you being a northerner in SC?

MAE: To tell you the truth, I don't remember too much about it. We were restricted to the base and you met fellas from all over the United States who were in the service too. I

remember one time we got, I think it was a weekend pass, and we decided to go into Spartanburg, or was it New Orleans? I'm not sure which it was now. Anyway, we were on a bus and of course, being from the north, we used to sit up anywhere in the bus. Well, we always sat in the back of the bus. But when we got down to, I think it was in Spartanburg, I'm not quite sure, we were told that we couldn't sit in the back of the bus. That was for the blacks. But it didn't bother us any, because, what did we know, we associated with them up here all the time too. So, we told the bus driver that we'd sit in the back. He said, "Well, I'm sorry," he said, "I'll have to stop the bus and put you off." So, we relinquished and went up there and sat up in the front there. It says on the sign on there, "For colored only" in the back. But we stayed up in the front to appease the driver and that's about the only thing I can remember. But, the south, we were 18 years old and you had to be 21 years old to get a drink in a bar and if you did go around a bar, they wouldn't serve you any alcohol because you weren't 21 years old. It's a funny thing, too. You're 18 years old and you could fight for your country but they wouldn't serve you a drink.

I: Was this your first time away from home?

MAE: Oh, yes. Absolutely. Yes, it was. And the first Christmas, down there, I'll never forget it. The song, "I'll be home for Christmas." And they had speakers all along the bases, all along the barracks and stuff and they were playing this Christmas music and you talk about a tearful guy. I couldn't be home for Christmas. So, it was quite a shock. But the training went fine. It was different and everything, but it went fine. We had a good, not a bad time.

I: You were trained in mortars?

MAE: I was in the heavy weapons company and we trained in heavy machine guns, water cooled 30-caliber machine guns and the 81-millimeter mortars. Yes, I was trained in that. Basic infantry training - hand grenades, rifle shooting, target practice, machine guns, pistols and all that stuff. It went with the basic training.

I: What unit were you assigned to?

MAE: When I was in the States or when I went overseas?

I: Well, in the States and then overseas.

MAE: Well, I was in Company D. I don't remember. Just Company D. I can't remember the designation or the battalion or anything like that. But it was just a regular infantry company.

I: When did you finally go overseas?

MAE: Early 1944.

I: Now were you assigned to a unit prior to going overseas or did you go over as a replacement?

MAE: No, when I finished my basic training, they sent me home for, I think, two weeks or three weeks and then I went back to, I think it was... I had to report at a certain place. I don't remember where it was now. But then they took us out and they shipped us out to New Orleans. We went down to New Orleans to a port of embarkation and we stayed

there for a while and they transferred us out to a place called Pittsburg, CA. That was a port of embarkation too. And that's where we left to go over to New Guinea. Eventually we ended up in New Guinea and I joined the 24th Infantry Division at New Guinea.

I: Was that where you saw... Was that in a combat zone, or did you?

MAE: It was. They had just secured the area called Hollandia over in New Guinea. They had just secured that area and then we went in and we joined the 24th Division and they used to take us out for training, more jungle training and then we went for different areas around there mopping up operations. They had already landed the 24th Division there. The 24th Division was at Pearl Harbor when the Japs bombed it. They never had been in the United States before. It was formed from the elements of the old Hawaiian Division and some elements of the 25th Division. They were formed in October 1941 and then they went to Australia for extensive island training and then they went to Hollandia, New Guinea, Tanahmerah Bay and we joined them shortly after that.

I: So, you came in as a replacement then?

MAE: Oh, yes.

I: How were you accepted as a replacement?

MAE: [Laughs.] People don't believe this, but you talk about segregation. We were all draftees and when we first got over there to the island the regular army fellows, you know, the fellows that were in the service before the war broke out, they didn't accept us at all. They had tents set up over there because most of the action was further away and they had set up tents over there and they didn't want anything to do with the draftees. The regular army fellows... It's like segregation, it really was. Eventually they started to ship home because they had accumulated quite a few points. Points were awarded by the time we were in the service, the length of time you were in there, the action that you'd seen and stuff, and these fellows were shipping out and that's why we were replacing them plus the fact that they had some casualties too, and we were replacing them too.

I: How long do you think it took you to be accepted in the unit then? With them being rotated out, you were more accepted?

MAE: Yes. Once they put us on patrols and stuff and going up in the mountains and mopping up operations, securing the communications and stuff like that, we had minor battles with the Japanese stragglers and stuff. But after that, you were pretty well accepted. Most of your friends were drafted too because the regular army guys were just about gone.

I: Did you find that your training prepared you for the jungle fighting?

MAE: Not the training we took. We took basic infantry training. But the jungle training was something different and they included that after we got to New Guinea. They gave us, I forget how many weeks of training. Took us out and showed us the ropes of how to fight in the jungle and stuff like that. But not the basic training that I took. It was just ordinary basic training.

I: Now you mentioned on your form here that you were in the Philippines. Could you tell us about that experience?

MAE: Well, October 20, 1944 was when we invaded the Philippine Islands. We went with General MacArthur and we landed on the... We had three regiments in our division, we had the 19th, the 34th and the 21st. I happened to be in the 21st Infantry Regiment and we didn't hit the beach the same time. Our position, or assignment was to secure a small island off the coast of Leyte in the Philippine Islands and the reason we had to secure that was they wanted... They had a PT boat base and we had to secure that island because there was a small bay where those boats went back and forth, in and out, during the battle of the Leyte Gulf. After they secured the island, then we joined up with our regular 24th Division which had been in Tacloban, Leyte, the village of Tacloban and through the Philippine Islands. We stayed there until we secured Leyte and then we went over to an island called Mindoro and from Mindoro, we went to Mindanao Island and there were another few other small islands in between. It wasn't that bad. We had our moments.

I: I noticed you said you suffered from jungle rot?

MAE: Oh, yes.

I: Did you get this in the Philippines?

MAE: No, in New Guinea. In the swamps over there. You walk around with your... We didn't have combat boots. We had the old-fashioned WWI leggings that they used to wear and then they came out with the combat boots and funny thing about it, all the fellows from MacArthur's headquarters wound up with the combat boots and the infantry soldiers still had to wear the leggings until the quartermasters got the boots in that would fit them. That's what we wore over there.

I: So, you had the low-cut shoes and the leggings?

MAE: Yes. And then later on, I don't remember exactly when it was, it upset us pretty bad because MacArthur's headquarters, all the fellows that were associated with MacArthur's headquarters came out with the brand-new combat boots and we didn't have them. We had the old-fashioned leggings. I don't remember just when it was they assigned us, but the quartermaster got it to us pretty good.

I: How did they treat your jungle rot?

MAE: They had a thing called methylate. It's not like an iodine but it's like a purple and you go to the aid station and they swabbed it on there and it cured it pretty good.

I: What did you think of MacArthur?

MAE: To tell you the truth, I thought he was a pretty good general and if I may tell you a story... We were on the island of Leyte and being that our regiment was assigned to a different smaller island because of the PT boat base they wanted to secure, our other two regiments were up in the front lines fighting and they took us over off the island to go back to Tacloban. The reason they took us back there was they had word that the Japanese were going to drop paratroopers and try and kill General MacArthur. Well, they took our, I'm not sure it was a whole regiment, I think it was a couple of companies and they put us back in the town of Tacloban. I drew guard duty one time. MacArthur had a large veranda, a large building that he acquired for his headquarters and it had one of these porches, or verandas, go all the way around it. One day I drew guard duty and I used to

have to walk up to a certain point, and then the other fellow would start it from this end and come back and the two of us would meet and we'd split and go back and forth. Well, I had guard duty that day and General MacArthur was sitting up on the porch and he was sitting in a rocking chair smoking a corn cob pipe. I looked down to my left and here comes a soldier, a GI and he was drunker than a hoot owl. He was really, really... He'd been drinking tubâ or jungle, what they call it? White lightning or something, but he was really, really drunk. And he was hanging on the fences as he went along. So, I cautioned him, I said, "Soldier, you can't stay here, you've got to keep moving. You've got to keep moving." So, he looked up and he says, "Is that the General up there?" And I said, "Yes, that's General MacArthur. Come on, you've got to keep going." And he stopped and he took a hold of the fence and I couldn't pull him off because I had my BAR, the Browning automatic rifle on my shoulder. I said, "Come on soldier, you've got to keep going." So, he looked up there and he said, and he was drunk, and he said, "General MacArthur, is that really you up there?" And surprisingly enough, the General looked down and he got up from his rocking chair and he had a corn cob pipe, and he looked down there and he said, "Yes, soldier it's me." And the soldier said, "I just want to let you know," and he threw him a salute, and he said, "I just want to let you know that I'm happy to be over here fighting with you." The General said, "Thank you," and he sat back down and the soldier walked on. But General MacArthur... I sort of liked General MacArthur. He wasn't the kind of a general that would pit his men or the division against a whole bonsai, like the Japanese would do. You'd fight individual battles, I'd say. He was a... A lot of fellows didn't like him, but I think he did a pretty good job when he was over there. And we stayed in the Philippine Islands for quite a while. I don't remember exactly the dates, but we stayed over there for quite a while. Then we went over to, they transferred us over to... The war had ended and they transferred us over to Japan for Army of Occupation.

I: Before you start with that, what was your reaction then when you heard about the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

MAE: To tell you the truth, I don't remember. We were probably elated. It meant the end of the war, but I really don't remember any feeling or anything like that, you know. It's just that you're so involved about your own little world that's going around you that half the time you don't realize what the heck is going on. And a lot of things I found out that, like I say, here you are in your own little world, your own little group and everything, you don't know what the heck is going on. And we had very little publications over there. We had a Yank magazine, but if you're lucky enough to get your hands on it, well you could find out different things that were going on in the world. But basically, you're only concerned with what's going on in your own platoon, your own company or division or so. But I think I was more emotional when I found out that President Roosevelt had died than I did the atomic bomb and about the atomic bomb. We were stationed only about thirty miles away from where Hiroshima... We were in a town called Okayama. We were only about thirty miles and a matter of fact, we went into Hiroshima, but you could only stay there a certain amount of time because the MPs would kick you back out because of the radiation.

I: What was your reaction to the destruction?

MAE: Unbelievable. Unbelievable. Unless you've witnessed something like that you can't believe it. I mean, just one bomb. It's really unbelievable. Unbelievable. Like I say,

we could go in there, we were only stationed only about thirty miles away from Hiroshima. We could go in there on a train or a bus or any way we could get a ride in there but it was... You couldn't believe it. I've seen all kinds of destruction but nothing like that. Nothing like that.

I: How long were you in the Army of Occupation?

MAE: I'd say between three and four months.

I: What were your relationships with the Japanese people? Did you have much contact with the Japanese people?

MAE: Yes, as a matter of fact they had programs over there for the GIs. You could go and have dinner with one of the Japanese families. As a matter of fact, they recommended it, to try to bring out good will amongst the people. And the few people that I stayed with - I'll never forget it. You had to take your shoes off when you went into their house. At that time, I had combat boots and I went to take my shoe off and I had a big hole in my sock. But they didn't think anything about it all. Some of them could talk English and some couldn't, and it just so happened that I was lucky enough to get with a family that could speak English, a limited amount of English. They had pictures on the wall, I'll never forget it, they had pictures of Tojo and they had pictures of Hirohito, the Emperor. And they used to say that the Emperor, in this particular family, they'd say the Emperor was good, but Tojo was not good. He was the war general or whatever they call them over there. But they didn't like Tojo at all and they didn't particularly care for the war. But there's nothing they can do. It's like us here. Whatever the politicians decide is the way we've got to go. But we had some of the craziest food. Raw fish, something... You'd learn to live with it. It wasn't a bad relationship with the Japanese. The first time after we got to Japan and the anniversary of Pearl Harbor... When we first got there, we couldn't have our ammunition with us. We had rifles and pistols, but you couldn't carry any ammunition. It was all for show. After the anniversary of Pearl Harbor, December the 7th - that would be 1945, I think it was 1945 or was it 1944, I'm not sure... We had to have ammunition because they weren't sure just what the Japanese were going to do because that was the anniversary of Pearl Harbor. We had to have loaded ammunition. Then we had a big parade over there too, but everybody had to carry live ammunition that time. But basically, if you had a sidearm or a pistol or a rifle or something, you couldn't carry ammunition with you because they were afraid of some guy lose his temper or something and kill a few civilians over there. But basically, the relationship we had with the Japanese people was fantastic, I'd say. Very, very friendly.

I: When were you discharged?

MAE: 1946, in January.

I: Now did you come home as a unit or did you...? Or just a group?

MAE: We came home - not as a unit. The Army had a situation, or a way of discharging people - what they called the point system. Points were awarded how long you were overseas, how many months you were in the service, how many battles you were in and the ones that had the most points were discharged first, which was like a seniority thing, which was right. Because some of the new fellows came in there, they were only with us about six months. There's no reason why they should go home when we in there for two

years or so. So, you accumulated points. I'll never forget it. I was in Japan, in Okayama, they had, I don't know how to say this, houses of prostitution. And they had one house for the officers, one house for the first three-graders and the other ones for the enlisted men. I happened to be in a geisha house that night when one of the fellows came in and he told me, he said, "Sarge, you're ready to go home. You better get out of here." I was on a three-day pass and I said, "What do you mean?" Well, he said, "Well, they got the roster set up," and he said, "You're ready to go on home in a couple of days." So, I just got everything together and I went back to the base and sure enough, my name was on the roster and they transferred me home. It was quite an experience, you know, for a young fellow, 18-20 years old. It was quite an experience over there.

I: Did you make use of the GI Bill at all when you returned home?

MAE: I did when I bought my first house, yes, I did. I never took advantage of the educational thing. I just took the GI and I bought my first house with it. And then I bought by second house with it. The one that we live in now.

I: How about the 52-20 club?

MAE: You know, I tell people this and they don't believe it. I was home for two weeks and I went to work right away. And they told me "You mean you didn't take the 52-20 club?" What was it - \$20 a week for 52 weeks?

I: Yes.

MAE: I said, "No, I didn't take advantage of it." I was never that type of person. I was always active and ambitious and so... No, I never took advantage of that.

I: Did you join any veterans' organizations when you returned home?

MAE: I didn't because the simple reason was most of the fellows like the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion – you go to the meetings and the first thing you know, they wind up at the bar. I was never much of a drinker, so it never appealed to me. But then my wife here, I'm not sure just when it was – do you remember when it was, hon? You got me to join? A few members of the church were veterans and they asked her if her husband was a veteran and she said, "Yes," and they said, "So, why don't you get him to join the American Legion," which I did. Now, I'm a member of the American Legion for about ten - twelve years, something like that.

I: Have you kept contact with anyone that you served with or gone to any reunions?

MAE: We have a reunion every year. They've been holding them since 1948. Unfortunately, I didn't find out about it until 1992. I came home one time. I had my grandson with me. We had just come home from a camping trip. I had my grandson with me and there was a letter in there and it was from Beaumont, TX. I said, "I don't know anybody from Beaumont, TX." And I happened to think, the wheels start turning. I told my grandson, I said, "You know what? I think that man, his name is John Raglan. I think that man signed the Japanese flag when I left Japan." He was my old foxhole buddy and he had gotten word that when you join the American Legion, they ask you if you had worn one of the patches from any of the divisions and get in touch with them so I did and that's when I found out that the 24th Division held reunions. That started in 1992. And I haven't missed one except last year, my mother died and I couldn't go to that one there.

I: How old was your mother?

MAE: 98.

I: Wow.

MAE: Yes, 98 years old. My stepfather, he's in the Veteran's Hospital over in Castle Point. He's 95 now, I believe.

I: What was he a veteran of, what war?

MAE: He was a veteran of WWII. But I met this fellow and he wrote me a letter. I opened up the letter meanwhile and I read the letter and he said he thinks he remembers me but he's not sure because of the name. He read it in American Legion magazine. When I joined the 24th Division, they put a pamphlet out about the people that had joined, so he saw my name in there and he said, "I think I remember you, but I'm not sure." So, I wrote him a letter back. Oh, I went upstairs. My grandson was with me. I went upstairs and I got the Japanese flag out that the fellows had signed when I left Japan. Sure enough, his name was on there. So, I wrote him a letter back and I told him, I said, "John," I said, "You're an old foxhole buddy." I said, "Here we worked together. I mean like foxhole buddies." We were foxhole buddies and I said, I decided to go the reunion and it was in Savannah, GA in 1992. Of course, I didn't know him. I walked into the hotel where the reunion was being held and there was a bunch of guys talking in the lobby and I asked them, I walked up to them and I tapped one of them on shoulder and I said, "You know a fellow by the name of John Raglan?" He looked at me and he said, "You mean Big John?" I said, "Hell, I don't know if he's Big John or Little John. I haven't seen him in 47 years." So, he looked around the lobby. "Oh, yeah, there he is over there talking to these people over there." So, I walked over and tapped him on the shoulder. He turned around. He said, "Milt." I said, "John." Then the tears started coming down. People were clapping and everything. Because we hadn't seen each other for 47 years. Now we keep in touch with one another all the time.

I: How do you think your service affected your life?

MAE: Actually, I don't think it affected my life at all. It was an experience. I was one of the fortunate ones that got through the whole thing without getting wounded or anything. Well, I can't say... I didn't get wounded, but I... That's another story. I slipped when we were mopping up operations. I slipped going up a mountain. I was helping one of the other GI's up because we had ammunition, mortar ammunition, and the mortars - that stuff is pretty heavy. I was up on top of the hill first of all and I dropped my pack and I went back to help this other guy and I slipped on a muddy section and I came down and cut my arm, ripped my arm open here. Well, they sent me down to the aid station to get it stitched up. The guy said, "Oh," he said, "We'll put you in for a Purple Heart." I said, "No, you don't put me in for a Purple Heart." I said, "That's for guys that get shot or get wounded or something like that." He said, "No, no," he said, "You're in a combat zone. You're entitled to a Purple Heart." I said, "No, you're not putting me in for one," and he never did. Unfortunately, I wish I had it now. But, no I don't think it affected my life any at all.

I: Does your arm bother you now?

MAE: Oh, no. No. I had a carbine and when I come down and off the mountain the clip on the carbine ripped my arm open.

I: Did you have any of the jungle rot? Your feet ever bother you or anything from that?

I: Did your unit suffer problems from leeches or dengue fever?

MAE: Oh, I had those sons of a guns on me. Yes. My God. You're in the jungles of New Guinea. Those things climb all over you, you know. Those things are mean. And the guys used to take cigarettes and put them on the leeches to get them to come off.

I: What about malaria or dengue fever? Nothing like that?

MAE: I never had none. Like I said, I was very, very fortunate. Malaria? They gave us Atabrine. Little yellow tablets. I used to take it faithfully. A lot of the guys didn't take it. That's another thing, too – when I first got over to New Guinea, a place called Goodenough Island, we were on a large ship, a transport ship. The fellows came out to unload the transport ship and I looked down over the side of the ship down there and these fellows were all yellow. I said, "My God, what the heck is going on?" I thought they were all Chinese, but they were American GIs, the engineers. And from taking these Atabrine pills... Yes, I'm quite sure it's Atabrine,

I: Atabrine, I believe so.

MAE: Atabrine pills, they were turning yellow and when I looked over the side of the ship to see these guys, I said "My God, they're all Chinese down there." But no, I was very fortunate, I never came down with any sickness except for that one incident when I cut my arm. Although, we were in quite a bit of action over there. A couple of guys that I can't even remember any more and I haven't seen their names in the publication that they put out that they had joined. But there were a couple of harrowing incidents over there that wake you up. One thing, we had secured an area and we were in a trench because it was getting dark and it was too late to dig a foxhole and they had just kicked the Japs off of the hill and when we were sitting in this trench it got dark. The first thing you know, I don't know what time it was, I didn't have a watch or anything. The first time, you looked up and you could see the light from the sky and first thing you know, I heard this noise. The fellow that was sitting right alongside of me, why he whispered over, "What was that?" I said, "It sounded like somebody." All of a sudden, there was an explosion, and this leg came down in the trench right in front of me, like this here, the leg was like that and I could hear the man dying, but I couldn't see whether it was an American or a Japanese because it was so dark. If I had seen the leg, I could tell whether he had leggings on or whether he had a combat boot on. And I couldn't tell until early in the morning. Then when the daylight started, I saw it was Japanese. What had happened – I don't know what happened. We were down in the trench and he must have pulled a hand grenade and tried to jump in the trench. That's what they used to do. If you're in a foxhole over there, they'd pull a hand grenade out, jump in the foxhole and kill themselves and they'd kill you too. He must have missed the trench or something and he just pulled the hand grenade and it blew him up. That was one of the experiences that I had.

Then another time, we were on top of a mountain and one of the fellows – we were out of water, and there was a stream down below. We sent some Filipinos down to get our canteens filled up and they came back up later on and they didn't have the canteens. They

didn't have any water. We wondered what happened. He said, one of the Filipinos said, "There's Japanese down there. They'll surrender to the Americans but they won't surrender to the Filipinos," because the Filipinos would have killed them on the spot. So, at the time, there was a rumor going around that if you brought in a Japanese prisoner so they could interrogate him, they would give you a, I think it was a 30-day pass back to the States. So, this same fellow that was in the trenches with me, he said, "Come on, let's get down and get ourselves a free ride home." Well, the two of us went down there. Where the Japanese were, they were inside of a large cave. There was a trail running right in front of the cave. This fellow was like a soldier of fortune. He had been in the army for quite a while. And he was like a soldier of fortune. He got on this side of the cave and I got on the other side of the cave on the trail. The cave was a humongous big cave. And he was hollering to surrender, that we were Americans, that we won't hurt you, we'll take care of you and we didn't hear anything. So, he kept this up for a while. How he never got shot is beyond me. He stood right up there in front of the cave. The cave was setting back in a ways. And he said... He talks different languages and stuff like that, you know? We never heard anything. So finally, he looked at me and he said, "Hey Eager, do you have any grenades?" And I said, "Yes." He said, "When I count to three, we're going to throw the grenades in." He counted to three and we threw the grenades in there. Then all hell broke loose. I'm telling you, I couldn't go this way here, because that was the way to get out. I had to go down that way because you could see the bullets coming down through there. And all kinds of explosions going off and everything. So, he went back that way and I started down. I had a Filipino guerilla with me and we went down the mountain that side and we came to a short drop. He gave me a push and I fell in the creek where the water was where we get our canteens filled. He fell in behind me but he couldn't swim. So, I had to pull my rifle out and I pointed my rifle to him and pulled him out to where he could touch bottom. Then we started working our way back up to where the rest of the company was. And I could hear these people coming down the side of the mountain up there and we snuck off to the side. It was the fellow that had left me down there. He went back up to the company to get some more men to come back down there and when I finally saw him, he said, "We came down to get your bodies. I thought you were dead." But to make a long story short, we stayed in that area for about a week and a half, I think. They tried firing bazookas into the mouth of the cave, and as soon as they did that, they tried to get the infantry to go back in there again. They couldn't get anywhere near that cave. So, then they called in for an air strike. A squadron of planes came over. They had two 250-pound bombs. I think they were P-40's underneath the wings and one 500-pound bomb under the belly. And they came in there. The rifle company went down there and laid out banners so they would know where to drop the bombs. They also had smoke grenades down there and these planes came in there and they bombed... We still don't know what was in that cave. After we got out of there, I told this friend of mine, I said, "You know, I'd like to go back there someday and find out what the heck was in that cave." To this day, we still don't know. As far as we know, the Japs are still in that cave.

I: You had some things you wanted to show us?

MAE: Yes, if you've got a little time. When I came, I had a sword that I took off of a Japanese when I was over in the Islands and when I came over to Japan, they told us you had to surrender it to the quartermaster, so I surrendered that to the quartermaster, but this isn't the sword that it was. The sword that I had was a beautiful sword. And you had

to hand it in to the quartermaster and they would put a tag on it with your name or your serial number on it and when I went to get it when I came home, this is the sword that they gave me. But it's a regular samurai sword.

I: Was that an NCO sword? Do you know if it's an NCO sword?

MAE: I think it is. It's one of the officer's swords. I'm not quite sure, but I think it's one of the officer's swords. But, the one I left over there, somebody must have taken the doggone thing. But this is the one that I wound up with. They wanted to disarm the Japanese army so what they did, when they surrendered, they had all the soldiers put all the Japanese army - they had all the soldiers put the stuff in the warehouse – rifles, pistols, any armament at all. When you went to go home, you went back to get the article that you tagged, and it wasn't there, so they gave me this sword as a... And I've kept it all these years.

I: You want to hold this up [medals displayed in frame] and tell Wayne to show that through the camera?

MAE: This is the awards case. I really wasn't much of a fellow that likes the limelight so to speak, but when I joined the Association, the 24th Division Association, I figured I'd start collecting this stuff. I used to have it all in my drawer. And the one thing I'm proudest of is the Combat Infantry Badge – it's up here [points to upper right corner].

I: Now where did you receive the Bronze Star?

MAE: This here... I got this from a staff sergeant that [unclear]. Sergeant Major. Because most of these medals here you don't get awarded. They don't pin them on you. And the Bronze Star you can get, but if you're in a heroic situation with a Bronze Star, that [points to Bronze Star in case] would have a "V" on it. But there was a concurrent award, and to earn the Combat Infantry Badge which is up here, entitles you to wear the Bronze Star. This is the WWII Victory Medal. This is the Philippine Liberation Medal and the Presidential Unit Citation from the Philippines. This is the Good Conduct Medal, Army of Occupation, and the WWII Victory Medal. These are the ribbons that I got when I was overseas in Japan. The stars pinned to the ribbons are battles that you were in. The arrowhead is just spearheaded in a particular landing.

I: Now when was the photograph taken?

MAE: That was taken in Japan – 1945.

I: Did you have some other things you wanted to show us also?

MAE: Yes. If you are interested in them. This was a picture taken at Camp Croft, SC.

I: Whereabouts are you in that picture?

MAE: I am right here. [Holds up picture. Points to second row, middle.] That was basic training down in SC. Spartanburg. This is the magazine that the 24th Infantry Division Association puts out about three times a year, four times a year and it tells you all the new members and the reunions and everything. It's a beautiful magazine that they put out. That's one of the older issues. The newer issues have colored pictures in it and everything. These are the Japanese flags that I brought home. [Holds up flag.] This one here, I had the Japanese mark the name on it. This is where we were stationed, Okayama and that's

the Japanese word for Okayama [points to area on flag]. It's sort of faded. There's Tokyo, there's one up here with Tokyo on it, right here, marked Tokyo.

I: Hiroshima's over here.

MAE: Hiroshima. And Kure. [Holds up another flag.] This is the one that I had where the fellows signed their names on it before I left Japan. There's 63 names on there, I think it is. This is the fellow here, John Ragland, that had signed it before and when I took it down to the reunion, I asked him to copy it because it's starting to fade out now. And so far, we found about three or four or five guys that used to be in our outfit with us. But right now, they're 60 and they're from all over the country here. This is one of the pillow covers they had during WWII [holds up cover]. I sent that home to my mother and she kept it. This is an album my daughter put together for me. She wanted to attend one of the reunions and this happened to be down in Nashville in 1995. It was strictly by coincidence that her vacation coincided with the reunion that we were in. This is the album that she made. This is [shows photograph] my daughter, her husband Fred and this is me here. And she had... This is a letter that she wrote and we wanted to put it in the Taro Leaf magazine – the Taro Leaf is the magazine that they publish three or four times a year. She did it. Oh, this my friend here, my old foxhole buddy right here, John Ragland. [Shows photo.] See our division was called the Victory Division [holds up publication entitled "The Victory Division in Desert Storm"] and they were in Desert Storm, too. As a matter of fact, they spearheaded Desert Storm. And what the heck was his name, the General, I can't think of his name, Schwarzkopf. Yes, he was the general in charge of it. This is my album here. I don't know if you can get a picture of it or anything. [Shows pages from album.] This is what I am proudest of – Combat Infantry Badge. That's my induction papers. A few people that went to my mother and the fellow I met with in Spartanburg, SC. This is the newspaper clippings from the Hollandia Invasion. This is when we hit New Guinea. My mother kept all the newspaper clippings whenever the 24th Infantry Division was mentioned in there, she would take the clippings and clip them out and save them for me. These are all the clippings about the 24th Division. There's a commendation from the regimental commander. There's a village here, the Japanese when they invaded the islands, they took a picture and when we went back to secure the town again, our regimental commander took the same picture that the Japanese took in the same area. If you look here, you can see the same building right here. This is a family that I spent some time with over in the Philippine islands and this is a letter from the fellow called Mateo. I asked my mother if she would send me a camera, but cameras and film were hard to come by back in WWII. She sent me a tiny camera with a roll of film and these are the pictures that I took with it. Some of them I had blown up. That's me over in Japan here. There's a bunch of fellows here. Now, you asked me before about coming home. When we got to Vancouver, I went down to the PX and the newspaper down there, they had a picture of us guys coming home. [Holds up photo.] And that's me up there, raising my hand. And this is the ship that we came home on, the SS Cape Meares. It was a Liberty Ship. This is an original V-mail I mailed to my grandfather and my mother kept it. This is a picture of Hiroshima but it's not too good because it's starting to fade out. This is real Japanese money, this here. There was one of the islands over there, we came across a group of Japanese and why they were handing out money, I don't know. Anyway, they had a safe and one of our mortars hit the safe and this money was laying all over the field. I picked this one up off a Japanese who got hit

by the shrapnel from our mortars. [Flips through book of photographs.] Any time I found anything about the 24th Infantry Division, I'd saved it. This is my discharge. I had a discharge and when I bought my house, the savings and loan wanted to have the regular discharge, so I gave it to them, hoping I'd get it back. Well, they lost it and I never got it. But it just so happens that when you get discharged, they advise you to go to your county clerk's office and have your thing photographed. I took it down to a photographer and he enlarged it right back to the same size that it was before. These are some Japanese – pictures of Japanese girls. This is from the 180th meridian. That's the International Date Line and when you cross the International Date Line, if you get there on Wednesday, when you cross over it's Friday. You lose a day, but when you come back home you gain that day back again. These are some of the programs they had on the boat on the way coming home. This is the lineage of the 21st Infantry Regiment. This is the first reunion I went to. I had an older van and I painted the insignia of the 24th Infantry Division on there. Here's one of the fellows here re-signing the Japanese flag that he had signed back in '46 or '45. And this a Pearl Harbor veteran. These are all pictures from the reunions that we've had. I guess that's about all guys.

I: Well, thank you very much.

MAE: Oh, one thing. We had a reunion down to Little Rock, AR and it had rained like crazy out there. First time I was in that area and I was concerned about my van because they were breaking into vans and stuff like that. I didn't want to get a ticket. I wasn't sure I was parked in the right area or not. So, I took off one day and I went down there to check on the van and when I got there, it had been raining. I walked up to the front of the van and I looked, and I said, "Damn, I got a ticket." So, it had rained and the paper was all wrinkled up and everything but it was underneath the windshield wiper. So, I took it off and I sat in the van and I unrolled it and everything and this is what it said.

I: Oh my goodness, isn't that something? [Camera zooms in.] What does it say?

MAE: [Reads note.] "Thank you for our freedom."

I: Okay, thank you.

MAE: Well, we have one more thing here. Recently the State of New York had a recognition program. Are you familiar with it?

I: Yes. I was going to ask you about that.

MAE: They awarded me a diploma. [Displays diploma from Newburgh Free Academy dated 6/25/22.]

I: Long time coming.

MAE: You know when I first got word on it, I figured out, "What the heck do I need a diploma, for, you know? I'm 77 years old, what do I need a diploma for?" So, I put the application aside and I forgot about it and then one time I figured, "Oh, what the heck," I said. I got thinking about it, "They'll probably mail it me." But at same day, the following day that they told me, my wife had got a call and they said, "We got your husband's diploma here and we're going to have it awarded to him at the Newburgh Free Academy." He said, "They're going to have a ceremony done there." She said, "You've got to be kidding me." So, we went down there and we had an awful nice time. They had a regular...

That's it, yes. [Shows photos.] There's a group of fellows there that got their diplomas with me. Not only that, but then they put it in the newspaper. [Shows newspaper clipping.] That's my family down there, on the bottom down there. My daughter, two daughters were there, right? Two daughters, and her son, my son-in-law. There's another picture of it that was in the paper. They really, really did put on a nice show down there for something you would never even think of.

I: One of the gentlemen that was in this, that's who we got this from this morning.

MAE: Really?

I: [unclear] Holman.

MAE: Oh, yes.

I: A Korean war veteran. We interviewed him this morning.

MAE: You see that? [Displays newspaper article and photo, "Veterans Get Overdue Diplomas".]

I: Well, thank you very much for your interview.

MAE: Well, thank you.