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Interviewers**

**Orchard Park High School  
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**Interviewer:** Were you drafted, or did you enlist?

**WC:** I was already in the service. I enlisted in 1931 and I went down to Alabama a year ahead of the war. I spent the whole war in the military, and after the war, I had thirty-five years of service altogether when I retired as a colonel.

**Interviewer:** Why did you go into the service?

**WC:** Well, during the Depression years, my father died. My mother had six children to raise, and I was twelve years old. I was the only one, so I had to get a paper route and do various other jobs in order to keep the family together. So, I had to be the father before I was being a real father. That was in 1931 when my father died.

**Interviewer:** How old were you when your father died?

**WC:** I was twelve years old.

**Interviewer:** Where were you stationed in the army when you joined the forces?

**WC:** I was in the National Guard in Buffalo in 1931. I joined there to get money, which I just explained to you. And they were called into service in 1940. And we went down to Alabama. And then I went to the Field Artillery School for a three-month course in Fort Sill. And while I was gone, the Japanese hit Pearl Harbor. And my whole outfit went on three trains across the United States to California, and we were headed out to attack the japs. And when we got there, and there were no ships. They were all on the Atlantic because we were fighting the war in the Atlantic at that time, not the Pacific. So we stayed there from December until April. And we boarded ship in April, they got some

ships around. They took us as far as Hawaii and dumped us in Hawaii. We couldn't go any further at that point. Of course, we were on the defense, the Japs hadn't attacked Pearl Harbor yet. We didn't go actually into combat until the Japs struck Pearl Harbor. other questions?

**Interviewer:** Were there many casualties in your unit?

**WC:** I don't think we had any. In fact, I was in better shape than I am now. I was in the artillery, And then I was in the 24th Corps as an operations officer during the war, and we had three battalions under our command: the 145th, the 198th, and the 225th Fielder Battalions. And we headed out into the Pacific after the Japs hit Pearl Harbor. The first island operation we went on was in the Gilbert Islands. I went on that one first. The whole outfit didn't go, but Marines went there. And I landed on Macon Island after I waited while the Marines landed on Tarawa. And I was scared to death because 1,200 men lost their lives going ashore at Tarawa. And we went in at Macon Island and we used the Navy Air Force to bombard the island of Macon before we landed. And they kept on bombarding that island back and forth until we put our feet on shore and I was scared too I can tell you that from what I heard earlier. And when we landed, the Japs didn't fire a shot at us. And it's unfortunate, when we hit the shore, in the boat next to me, everybody had their rifles but they had their fingers in the trigger and when the boat went forward in the boat next to me, the man pulled the trigger and shot the first American in the back of his head, accidentally. And they dragged him out, I can still see it. And after that, the next man that got killed was Colonel Conroy. After we were on the island, the Fighting 69th Regiment was the infantry that we were with. They stopped. The Japs were firing. And they didn't know where they were firing from, and Colonel Conroy jumped up on top of a and he says, "Come on you", and when he did, he got a bullet right between his eyes. And there was a Jap tied up in a tree, a palm tree. And I think every man in the Fighting 69th must have fired their rifle at that fellow. And it cut the ropes off of him and everything. And he kept tumbling down, and he couldn't move after that. That was a shock to me at the time. We captured the island in three days, and those were the only two casualties in that operation on Macon Island. The Marines went in at Tarawa and they had 1,200 men mowed down going ashore in the water. There was a big mistake made. The tide was going out and the men were going in on their boats and they hit the reef too soon because the water was going down and they had to disembark and go the rest of the way against the tide. So they lost 1,200 men on that landing operation.

**Interviewer:** By drowning or by firing?

**WC:** Machine gun fire. And I was on the next island and I heard all about it and it just gave shivers all through me to think that that took place. Do you want me to continue or do you have some questions?

**Interviewer:** You can keep going if you want if you just want to tell us stories about things that happened.

**WC:** Oh, I'll do that. I went back to Hawaii after that operation and they sent the 106th Infantry, which I didn't go on, out to the other islands in the Pacific and they got us ready to go to Saipan and before that, I went back over to Lady Island and we had no opposition in Lady Island or the other islands so I went up to Okinawa from there. I have here a picture of the map of Okinawa. We landed up in here. You can see where the forces went in here. And we come down the island this way, and we captured the island, I fired the last shot there and everybody went home. I was a Captain and they filled our outfit up with a lot of high-ranking officers. They didn't know what to do with them, because they were Coast Artillery, and actually, I was running everything they didn't know much about the artillery. We had a colonel from West Point who was our CO at the time and he pushed me aside because I was National Guard. I don't know whether you knew, but ever since the Civil War days, the National Guard and West Point never got along together. But I don't know what took place. At any rate, we became real good, close friends. In some ways, we got together better. It was a wonderful occasion to have the Military Academy unite with the National Guard, which were at odd ends for so long. He visits me, he brought his whole class up here one time to the Bethlehem Steel Plant, toured the Bethlehem Steel Plant, and looked me up. I had invited him out to my house to dinner while I was here. Later, he was teaching down at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces in Washington, DC, when he brought his class up here. And he took them back there. Then I got in touch with him. Now, I'm jumping from one thing to another. I want to go back to the combat, go back to Okinawa. In Okinawa, I wasn't in the driver's seat anymore. I was flying all over, and I knew everything that was going on, I was in a Piper Cub. And you could see where the front lines were. In front of the front lines, there was a blade of grass for as far as the eye could go, where the Japs were. Everything was all green where we were. That's how many shots were blown around there. I'm flying around, and I see this big green area, a silo, a farmhouse. And I thought to myself, what's that doing out here not all blown up? So I flew over to it, a big mistake. The Japs were like flies in there. A shot rang out, and it exploded at about 20,000 feet. The next one was in front of my propeller. The next one was behind me, and I put my two hands on the pilot and I said, dive, dive, dive, and we dove down and I said, keep going. I'm looking over his shoulder and the Japs are running in every direction. They thought we were crashing into them. So we went down as far as the trees were high and we went back and when we landed when we had a hole in the wing about that big. So that was the closest I ever came to not being here today. But I kept my cool with me and I had sense enough to stop that. Now I have the picture that I showed you. This is a picture of Okinawa or the last battle. I was on Saipan and Tinian before that and I brought you the actual... I was an operations officer on the Saipan operation and these are the actual troops that landed there, and we came in here on the island and that was on the west side of the island. We went across down this way and these show the front

lines as we went up and we turned around and went up and took this island in, I think, around three days. This is Saipan, that's the island of Saipan I just showed you there. These are actual maps, this is the actual one that I made a copy of. This is Tinian. It's six miles from Saipan, and that's Agweijan. Saipan is up here, I flew over there by myself and a pilot to find out about Tinian. I came from Saipan, and I flew all along the shore here down and all the way around here and up, and there's an airfield here. Never fired a shot at us, the Japs never fired a shot and the pilot said, let's capture the island. So we landed on the airstrip, and we're taxiing along and a Jap came out on a bicycle to meet us. I'm thinking all along here, what if he captures us and don't let us go back? I know everything about this island from flying around it. I said to the pilot, no, let's go back. Let's not be a hero. We may have been able to convince the Japanese to surrender, but I'd never know. So when I got back, I told Colonel Taylor the whole thing. He says, write everything down and send it up to the 5th Amphibious Corps, the Marines, they're the ones that are going to go in there. So, I sent it all up to their command post and lo and behold... Here is a picture of the island, here is a picture of the island here, there is Saipan. I flew over here and there are two airstrips on the island. We landed on them and I decided to go back and I turned all of the information in up to the 5th Fib Corps. This is me, this is what I got written up about me, not even my name. That is the Island of Tinian. So I told my CO and he said, write it all down. I went up to their 5th Fib Corps, that was the Marines, I am Army, we do not get along. I explained it all and the commander of the 5th Marines, he did not like the Army, he made no bones about it. Admiral Spruance was at the headquarters at the time and he said, put this aside, and he said to the general, he said, you go down to Guam and take care of that operation on the island, I am going to take care of this one. That is what he said because I had all of the information he needed. So Admiral Spruance was his name and it is written up right here where he said, Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, U. S. Navy, 5th Fib Corps, probably the most brilliant, this is what he said, probably the most brilliantly conceived and executed amphibious operation of World War II. The 2nd and 4th Marines Division landed on the island on July 24th, barely two weeks after the capture of the Saipan operation. Nobody was killed, honest to god. The Japs pulled out of the island over on this side and they went all the way down the island down here and we bombed the town. Our forces landed there, nobody was killed and went down at the end of the island and we took over the island in three days without a loss of an American boy's life. What they wrote it up in here was they like to say that somebody got killed but they didn't. I landed on the island the next day with no shooting on the island at all. The operation was declared by Admiral Spruance the most perfect operation of World War II. Now another operation I was on was prior to the Saipan and Tinian I was selected to go on the first operation of World War II in the Pacific. I was operations officer on that island and these are actual pictures and maps that show you what it looks like when you're going to land on an island. You're looking at all that, that's what you see. You just see a bunch of trees and sand, that's all you see, that's all the way along there.

**Interviewer:** Is that Tinian?

**WC:** No, this isn't Tinian, this is Macon, this is Macon Island, and only two lives were lost in that whole operation. The colonel was shot between the eyes, and there was a Jap tied up in a tree, and he fired it hit Colonel Conroy and killed him. One of the fellas spotted him up there, he was tied up there. There was a machine gun, bullets hit the top of that tree, cut the ropes off of him with the bullets, and he come tumbling down on the ground, kaplunk. He was gone, boy. But I remember that he was killed, and accidentally a boy was killed on the landing of the boat next to me. When the boat hit the beach, everybody went forward, and one man had his hand on the trigger of the gun, and it went off and left the bag ahead of the other man in front of him. Two people lost their lives, the captain and this island. Oh, well, here is the complete picture. All the pictures they took of the island of Saipan. They were off the Yorktown Aircraft Carrier of Saipan, October 24th—no, I'm sorry, 23 February 1944. These pictures were taken all the way around the island. I don't know how to lay them out so you can—can you see this? All it does is show land, actually, all the way around. The pictures—the Navy took those pictures all the way around the island of Saipan before we landed there. If you want to—that's the far end of the island. They are all in sequence. Yeah, it goes right around the island like this. I have covered Saipan and Tinian. I went to Leyte, we didn't do anything there. But when we got up to Okinawa, that was a big battle. The Japs were waiting for us by that time. It was only a short distance to Japan, and they defended it really heavy at Okinawa. However, my CO was regular Army. Regular Army and the National Guard don't get along. I was an operations officer all the way across the Pacific. He took me off of that. I had nothing to do. So I flew behind the lines and flew everywhere. I knew where the Japs were. I knew where everything was. And while I was—did I just cover that where they fired at me and I came back down? Well, I won't go over that again. I am trying to force too much in at the same time. I was an operations officer all across the Pacific. He took me off and I was doing everything by myself and I got to know an awful lot where the enemy was and everything. So finally, he pinned me down. He put me on nights by myself all alone. I was in my glory. I had a telephone, I had three battalions of Marines connected to me, I had three battalions of Army connected to me. A battalion is—the size of a battalion is about 300 men in each one. I am alone at night, and the Japanese start firing and artillery at us. They were planning an attack, which I found out later on. They were going to have a massive attack against the Army. But I did not find that out until after the war was over, I read a book about it. They opened fire. They opened fire with their artillery, and I said to the telephone operator, ring up the observation battalion, which he did. And I said to the observation battalion, will you give me the coordinates of the Jap artillery that is firing and then in the meantime I said to the operator fire mission down to these six battalions. Fire mission, five volleys, center range, time on target, fuse quick, five percent white phosphorus, five percent fuse delay, coordinates will follow, mark time, time on target plus 20 minutes, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3,

2, 1, and I sat back. Six battalions, 12 guns, five volleys, 360 shells, six-inch shells hit the Japanese regiment in a minute and a half. There wasn't a shot fired the rest of the night. It was all quiet. Nobody was firing anything. The next morning, I woke up, and I went down the command post, and my telephone operator was standing there with a whole bunch of men around him, and he's describing what I did. And he said to me, do you know what you did last night? You got a shot at the Jap artillery. The war is over. They're coming back through the lines. They want to see our machine gun artillery. And it was over, there wasn't another shot fired, and he's describing this here, and I'm sleeping over there. It was the end of the war. So everybody went home from Okinawa, but it took about two months. But me, I'm the only one, they kept me there. The colonel was sitting in the tent. His name was Waterman. He was a graduate of West Point. I'm National Guard. I'm a captain. He's sitting there, and I'm running the operation. He turned and he said to me, there's a plane waiting for you. You're going to go down to the airport, take all your luggage and everything with you. They're going to fly you all the way home. And I said you're kidding. No, you just go down there. So that's what he did for me. They lined up this airplane. I flew all the way across the Pacific. First, we stopped in Hawaii to get fuel. We stopped in San Francisco to get fuel, and we ended up down in Georgia and they didn't know, I guess, about the airstrip up on Niagara Falls. I don't know whether it was there or not. There wasn't any military there. So I took a bus from there home. That was the end of the war, and I ended it.

**Interviewer:** What was the date you were sent home?

**WC:** Gosh, it was 1944. I was flown back on July 24th to the United States. The war was over at that time. Any other questions?

**Interviewer:** What did you do for fun during the nighttime when things got kind of maybe boring? Did you guys play games or play jokes on each other?

**WC:** We never had any bombs or anything fired at us. We were always doing the shooting. The Japanese were pretty thinned out. They were on all the islands in the Pacific and we were concentrating on getting them off those islands one by one. Any other questions?

**Interviewer:** What did you do after you got home from the war?

**WC:** What did I do? I had a wife waiting for me and two children. I was in the military a year before the war broke out, and I was stationed down in Alabama. My wife was with me, and the children were born after the war broke out. Any other questions?

**Interviewer:** What would you say is the one thing you'll never forget from being in the service?

**WC:** Oh, I had a close call. Remember I told you I was flying around behind the lines and everything? Maybe I did mention it. And I saw this place where there were trees and

houses and everything, and I flew over there. I did mention that, didn't I? But that was about that far away from not being here today. That was my scary moment. Anything else?

**Interviewer:** I think times up.