

**William Kyron Corcoran
Veteran**

**Michael Russert
Interviewer**

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WC: [Corcoran reading something] “Enemy artillery fire becoming more intense. The guns were firing from Karema Channel, Nakagusuku Bay, and the Shuri Line. They came out in all directions. There were no dead angles.”

See, they could tell where your artillery was because it is always in a straight line and they can shoot back at you. I was the operations officer for 24th Corps Artillery and we had three battalions of Marines attached to our three battalions. So one fifty-fives. And the colonel put me on nights by myself. There was no action in the daytime. The Japanese were in the caves. Sixty-five feet below the ground. Nothing could touch them. The big battleships couldn't even touch them. I didn't know that until I read it here. They got flushed out. We had a monsoon. They got flushed out of the tunnels and caves because they filled with water. And it just so happened I was on nights and they had planned a strategic withdrawal because they were out in the open then. And they had to find another place. So they had all their infantry ready and they had the 7th Regiment Artillery ready to throw some fire to make it look like they were attacking.

I was on nights and the Japanese artillery started to fire. It was just me and a telephone operator. The colonel and his staff were on days. So I told the operator to bring up the observation battalion. They were attached to us. And he did, and I asked for the coordinates for the Japanese artillery that was firing. And then I said, all right, to the operator, ring up the six battalions all on one line. I got them there. I said, fire mission, group five volleys, center range. Time on target. Shell HE, five percent white phosphorus, five percent delay fuse. Coordinates will follow. Mark time, twenty minutes, time on target. [I counted down] ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one, mark. And I just sat back. The coordinates came in and down they went. And they just waited twenty minutes to set it up. I just sat there. Then all of a sudden, [imitates incoming] all coming from different directions, because the all battalions, they were scattered. And that's why I knew this was the shot that I fired because they said they were

coming from different directions. And they all came in on that 7th Regiment. In a minute and a half, three-hundred-sixty rounds hit them. All quiet the rest of the night. There wasn't a shot fired anywhere.

The next day, I was just sitting around and one of the enlisted men said, did you hear what's happening? I said, no, why? The Japanese are giving up and they're coming back through the lines. And they wanted to see our machine gun artillery. They couldn't believe it. [Holds up a book] In here, this man describes it. He said. He didn't say big machine artillery. It was these people coming back. But the shots were coming from all different directions because our battalions were scattered around. They weren't all together. And when they came in and hit the target, they were coming in this way, they were coming in that way at the target and hitting it. That was the end of the end of the war. I think it was the 27th or 21st of July. It was over with, and I didn't know it until I read this story. This is very interesting to read if you ever get a chance.

Q: Okay, I've seen that. I noticed that it was just out in the bookstore. I just saw that.

WC: The bad feature about it is that it is not continuous. It resumes from the different units, so it bounces back and forth in its scenario. Like Farewell to Shuri. That's when they decided to leave after the bombardment and the water filled up the caves. They were out. So that's where they were, down in the ground, sixty-five feet. But that doesn't show any war pictures. I got some stuff in there I got from Jack Barton. They didn't touch them.

That's why I know they're in my files. I had some nice pictures. I just apparently tore my house apart trying to find them. Then I said, oh, man, those kids of mine.

Q: Okay, well, I'm going to start with some very informal questions, a little bit about yourself, and then I want you to do most of the talking, just like you've been doing because this is going to be your story.

This is an interview with William Corcoran at the Connecticut Street Armory in Buffalo, New York. It is Wednesday, June 12, 2002 at 1:00 p.m. The interviewer is Michael Russert. Could you tell me, sir, I know I just said it, but your full name and when and where you were born, please.

WC: William K. Corcoran. I was born in Buffalo, New York on December 3, 1915.

Q: What was your pre-war education?

WC: I had grade school and high school, and I had two years of college when I was called into service. I didn't go back to college afterwards because I got married.

Q: Did you work at all before you went into military service?

WC: Oh, yes, I worked at Bethlehem Steel for 42 years altogether. Take out five years for World War II. That would reduce the time I was in there.

Q: You enlisted in 1931?

WC: Yes, sir.

Q: Could you tell us about it?

WC: I was 15 years old.

Q: 15 years old?

WC: Yeah. Do you know why? It was during the Depression and they took anybody. Of course, I was pretty tall at that time. I never got any taller after that. But the sad part of it was they paid one dollar a day for drills, and it's during the Depression now, mind you. So after I got in there, I spent the first three years as a private. I learned an awful lot there when I was 15 years old with some of those guys that were tougher than anything. But I just minded my own business. They didn't pay any attention to me much or anything. I think I was a PFC. After that, the officers didn't pay much attention to the men. But during the Depression years, I joined to get some extra money because my dad died in an accident. I had five brothers and a sister, so I worked on a golf course and I joined the National Guard. I worked for Bethlehem Steel.

I was pretty busy when I first got in there and went through the time. I studied and I learned everything I could about the military so I could advance. After the first year, I found they only paid me for one third of the drills. Instead of me getting forty-eight dollars for the whole year, I only got a third of that. I had to buy shoes with it and some boots. So it was pretty much a waste as far as getting money was concerned. When it came time for me to reenlist after a year, and I'm only at PFC, I was going to get out, and the commanding officer said, I'll give you a promotion. He was going to make me a corporal. And, boy, from there on, I went up the ladder. I became the first sergeant.

And the only reason I became first sergeant is they came around to the federal inspection. The regular army officer went through his whole outfit, asking all the men questions, everybody questions and everything. He doesn't ask me any

questions. So finally he stopped. He said to the CO, is there anybody in your outfit that knows anything? I still remember him saying that. He said, you might talk to Corporal Corcoran there. So he got me aside, and he got a naming circle, and he said, what's this part? This part? I described every part of it. [He said] How do you set it up? How do you move it? He went from one thing to another. I guess we sat there for about half an hour, three quarters of an hour. He asked me questions. I answered all his questions. [He] Turned around, he said, Captain Von Dyke, he said, you don't even know anything about your men. Here's the only man in the outfit that knows anything. [laughs] So I ended up being a first sergeant just like that from a PFC. And I learned enough.

Q: How old were you when you were first sergeant?

WC: About twenty at that time. I was 15 when I joined. [unclear] 10.29 But it was exciting after that. I studied and became an officer in 1937. I had quite an experience in World War II. We went down to Alabama, and the first thing they did was put me in charge of the training cadre. To train all the brand new recruits that came in. There were a bunch of officers from the 101st Regiment, the Elite Regiment in New York City. I had to teach them about field artillery. I took them out and had them run problems and do firing and things in the meantime. Then after that, they put me down training all the recruits that came in. So what was happening was that I went in there as a second lieutenant and all the people from World War II were all majors, lieutenant colonels. We had a regiment and they were all high rank and they were holding all those jobs. The battery commanders were from World War II. They were captains. You couldn't get anything. So it was very slow moving up in the ranks from that. But I still took all the courses, the ten series, the twenty series, and the thirty series for promotions from there.

Q: Can I go back for 1 second? What happened when you heard about Pearl Harbor? Where were you? What was your reaction to that?

WC: Oh, good. I was on the Tennessee, Arkansas, Louisiana maneuvers in 1941 and around September, I think it was about September, the regimental commander sent me to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, the field artillery School. He didn't have any spots for me in the regiment, so he sent me out to school for three months. I was at Fort Sill when Pearl Harbor happened. I had my wife with me, too, and it was quite a shock when I heard what had taken place. So overnight they moved the whole 27th Division on three railroad trains across the United States. In twelve hours they were in California, and I was still at the school. So they let me complete the school. The end was December 21. Then I returned to Fort McClellan, because I didn't know where they were and I needed

transportation, so I took my wife back home. I went down to Fort McClellan, got travel orders and a ticket on the train, and they told me to go to Riverside, California. So I ended up in Riverside. And the sad part was we were supposed to go to the Philippines. No, the good part, we were supposed to go to the Philippines and we couldn't. There were no ships in the Pacific. They were all in the Atlantic. So they sent us up to Fort Ord, California, for training up there until they got some ships to take us. In the meantime, the Philippines was taken over and we were able to get out by April of 1942, I think, and they had to dump us in Hawaii. So in Hawaii. Is that my resume? I mailed it to you?

Q: Yes.

WC: I think I brought one along, too. Very good. I don't remember mailing that to you. My first job there...I was raised to a first lieutenant back in Alabama. So my first job was making maps and surveying for our office. We were scattered around all the islands there. From there we moved over to Oahu. When we got to Oahu, our artillery set up defenses.

Our guns were at Mikaela Ridge, 106th Field Artillery. And the Hawaiian Department used to come down and test fire us at times and I don't remember now exactly when we boarded ship to go. Oh, they transferred me from the 106th to the 105th Field Artillery.

I was the operations officer at the time with the 106th. So they transferred me to the 105th. At first I don't know why they transferred me. [laughs] The S3 [training officer] of the 105th's parents died and he had to go home. So I was S3 and I found out I'm going to battle at Makin island with the 105th Field Artillery and my outfit was still in Oahu.

I hit the first Battle of the Pacific. It was on Makin island and Tarawa. I went aboard a ship and I think that was a Pierce. On Board ship we had a six-ten radio. Listened to the Marines landing at Tarawa and they were going ashore. They were in the boats at first and the tide was going out. Big mistake that the Navy and everybody made. They hit the reef with the boats and the men disembarked and no pre-firing of the island and they started ashore. I was listening to a six-ten radio. I had never been in battle before. Twelve-hundred men were mowed down, walking ashore against the Japanese fire. They were waiting for them. And the only reason they didn't bombard the island was because they wanted to surprise the Japanese. This was the Marine Corps. They wanted to surprise the Japanese. Surprise them. We had about fifteen ships out there parked, so there was no surprise.

And I was sitting there watching it and I'm going to go to Makin. Well, who did they call? [They called] my name first, to go over the side and go down the net at Makin Island. In the meantime, we had scheduled. This is the army now, not the Marine Corps of the Navy. We scheduled a bombardment of the island of Makin by the Air Force, the Naval Air Force aircraft carrier Alaska Bay. Everybody went back and forth and just raked it with bombs and everything, and I still was scared going over the side. I got in the landing craft and found out that we were the first landing craft, but there were nine more of them following me. We were all going in together. We started circling, going around, and first, one by one, all the fellows that were in the boat with me were starting to throw up. The boat was going up and down, and the smell was so bad, I got so sick, I couldn't wait until I hit the beach. I just said, yes, that is true. I didn't care about bullets or anything. That's how sick I was. [laughs] So that's just a funny part of this story. Forget about getting shot, but get me off of this boat. [laughs] When I got on the island, being an operations officer, I ran into some problems which I couldn't solve right away. First of all, it was below the equator. I registered the guns, the firing batteries; the three of them landed. The forward observer couldn't find where the shells landed. I was using this map of Makin island, which was made up by the Navy. I don't know whether the needle points in a different direction when you're below the equator. Does it? I still don't know.

Q: Not sure.

WC: But at any rate, maybe they made a mistake down there when they laid the battery.

Lo and behold, I got a radio announcement from the Navy. They were in the bay, and they said there were some artillery shots landing through our destroyer. [laughs] So right away I knew where I was at, and I switched the guns around just the right amount. I had it right in front of Lieutenant [Ross L?] Trippy [?] and the shots were coming down in front of him then. We cleaned up that island in three days. And I think there was only one thing I remember that hit me real hard. Colonel Conroy jumped up on the top of a tank because all the men stopped at a trench. There was somebody firing, and they didn't know where they were firing from. So he jumped up on top of this tank. [He said], come on you son-of-a-guns, keep going. Just as soon as he said that, he got a bullet right through the center of his head. A Jap was tied up in a coconut tree. When they saw him up there, they just machine gunned him down. But that's where they got the shot from. But, you know, from man to man to man, that went around the island. This was the fighting 69th. It went around the island all the way back to my command post and everything that Colonel Conroy was just killed. No, he was the second one.

The guy in the boat next to me got killed. We hit the beach and everybody was standing with their guns ready in front of them. And a man had his finger in the trigger, and the boat hit the beach and went forward. He pulled the trigger, put a bullet through the back of the head of the man in front of him in the boat next to me. They dragged him out and laid him on the beach. I still remember that. And it was by our own man, the first man killed going in on the landing. But the bombardment saved us where the Marine Corps should have bombarded for their landing.

We went back to Hawaii after that operation, after three days. In the meantime, a Jap submarine fired a torpedo and broke the Liscome Bay Aircraft Carrier in half. Eight hundred men lost their lives. And guess what happened? Two-hundred men came aboard our ship, all covered with oil. The one part of the ship went right down immediately when it was hit. And these fellows said the flames were going up the end of the ship, the catwalk. Where you go out through. We walked along and the guys said to shut the door because the smoke was getting in. And he wanted to get out of there. He ran and he took a jump right through the flames. He didn't care what was on the other side. Lo and behold, there was nothing and he landed in the ocean. He told us this story. And these twelve-hundred men, they stayed with that and they went down. It finally went down. It was never announced anywhere in the news. And I don't think it's ever been announced today that the Liscome Bay was hit and broke in half. Eight-hundred out of the twelve-hundred men were lost. So we went back to Oahu, and from there we went through training. Am I going too long?

Q: No. This is as long as you want it to be.

WC: We got back to Oahu and we started training again. Part of our division went to Kwajalein. We didn't go because we'd already been on operation with the Fighting 69th. We were preparing for Mariana, Saipan and Tinian. In the meantime, while we were on Oahu...the Japanese hit Pearl harbor, if you remember, but they only sank one ship, the USS Arizona. The rest of them were damaged, and the Pennsylvania was laying on its side. So when we got there, they hung concrete on the side of it to get it level, and they took all those battleships back to San Diego and repaired them. The only one they couldn't do was the USS Arizona. And the surprising thing was the Japanese didn't drop anything in Honolulu. None of the civilians didn't get...

Q: Why?

WC: Why, because they were all Japanese. That's what I figured. But they didn't destroy anything else. They machine gunned Schofield barracks. It's still the same one. They machine gunned Hickam Air Force Base quarters. They're still there. The hangars are still there. The big damage was on Fort Island. The hangar was blown up there. They hit Kaneohe Marine base, only machine gunned. But they didn't destroy anything else on the island. We went into all these other islands, and I was very surprised how we leveled all the cities and everything. On Saipan, Sharon Kanoa, the Navy just bulldozed everything right down. I think the Japanese were getting the messages. The other thing was, at Pearl Harbor, they were expecting them to come in from the west, and they came in from the north. And here's something that a lot of people don't know, and I think today they still don't know. The Japanese were planning this operation for one full year before they attacked. Would you believe that? They went up to North Honshu and they set up an island up there, everything to look like Pearl Harbor. And they sent the crews up there in small amounts, so nobody ever noticed. Of course, you didn't have airplanes flying over and sending a message back or anything, so nothing got out. They planned that whole attack up there, and then they loaded up in ships, and they came down through the Central Pacific at about twelve miles an hour. I think that's a little fast because they took two tankers with them and they were down level with the water with fuel because they couldn't make that whole trip without having the fuel. And so they had to go as slow as they were. And then they stopped, I don't remember how many, maybe a hundred miles north of Honolulu, north of Oahu, and they came down through the center of the island and spread out and ran and hit. But the whole thing was planned a whole year before it happened. Roosevelt and everybody were down in Washington with the diplomats and they were always blamed that he started it. But he didn't. They had a plan for a long time.

That was Pearl Harbor. Go back to where we were going down to Saipan and Tinian. We went in there on a big convoy. There are some maps in there. This is Saipan. [shows map photos] This is where they committed suicide. All the people, they jumped off of here because the Japanese told all the people that they would get killed anyway. This is going down through the island. [pages through map photos] Mount Tapochau is right about here. There's Mount Tapochau. [points to it on the map] This is Sharon Kanoa, houses and things. And that's Mount Tapochau. And this is Magazine Bay over here. Our forces landed right through here. And the 2nd Marines, I think, stopped about here. They didn't go any further. The 4th Marines went in. Then the 27th Division followed them and

spread out to the south. Now I have a map in there to show you how the operation went.

[continues showing map photos] Here you can see Magazine Bay and you can see where we came through the opening here. It's better to look at the map on the island.

Q: Now you mentioned before...who took these photographs that you have here?

WC: It's right here.

Q: Okay.

WC: From the Yorktown aircraft carrier before the battle. They were taken February 23, 1944 at two-thirty at two-thousand feet. Saipan Conference [unclear]. 29.34. This is just Saipan. [looks for a different paper] There's the map there. That's the only thing I got.

I can't even find my original picture and I got my original out and that appeared in the paper in November because they cleaned me out. [laughs] Okay, this is Magazine Bay. [shows a map of Saipan] All of our forces were over here. They landed here at Sharon Kanoa and they didn't go down there yet. The 2nd Marines went here. It shows the Japanese here. The 3rd Marines crossed the island here. The 27th Division came in and came down here. There's a map in there. It shows the front lines, everything. This is where you can see here how our forces came in and went down through here and then out and took the whole island. Can you see that? There's a lot of information on here. Now if you want to get a copy of this thing, I think it says on here where you can send.

Q: We can read that and find out later.

WC: Then let me get the map of the operation. [picks up a stack of documents] I'll go over those afterwards. Here is a copy of my Bronze Star medal that I got. I can keep that. And this citation is when I retired.

Q: When did you receive the Bronze Star?

WC: It was pinned on me on the island of Saipan after the Battle of Tinian. It was given to me because I flew a plane. I'll describe that to you in a minute. This here is probably the same thing you already have. When I first went into the service, the important thing about an officer is transportation, communication and firepower. It's still that same thing. Missing any one of those items, your operation won't succeed. Also, when you get into battle, reconnaissance, selection and occupation of position. The colonel takes his battery commanders and he goes around, he finds out where he's going to put those batteries. That's called

reconnaissance. Then he comes back and they take over and they take their batteries up and put them in position. Before we went to Pearl Harbor, General Patton started in a small tank unit on the Tennessee, Arkansas, Louisiana maneuvers. He was riding around there. I think we had about seven tanks. He's standing up in them and all he's doing is creating a lot of dust. But that was during June, July of August of 1941.

Now, here's some actual photographs taken by the Signal Corps. And on the back here, you have to have permission to copy them. This was taken from the top of Mount Tapochau and shows our forces were up there by this time. [shows photograph] That's why we got the picture. And these are pineapple, banana trees and papaya trees. And here's a ship that sank. And this is one of the US ships offshore. Now, this will give you an idea what our troops did. The Japs didn't hurt Honolulu, but this is Garapan [Saipan] after we bombarded it. So you can go through the town without somebody hiding in there and shooting at you.

Q: Now, this is on Saipan.

WC: This is on Saipan. All these pictures are of Saipan. [shows photograph] There's Mount Tapochau. And if you remember, the picture was out here and magazine Bay is here. These are the 27th Division, the Fighting 69th. These are actual. Right down in the front is where these are. The front lines were up in here at that time with the rest of their unit. But this is at the end of the island where they were securing it. [shows photograph] The ammunition dump blew up.

Q: This is the one you hit.

WC: Yeah. I'll tell you a little about that. That happened that first night we were there. We had all of our airplanes on the little airfield. And the next morning we wanted to shoot, and I couldn't raise the pilots down there, so I jumped in the jeep and I went down to the airfield. I got down there and all the planes were upside down. They were laying on the ground, flipped over, and the pilots were just sitting there. I said, why didn't you call us? [He said] We didn't know where you were. [I said] You have the radio in there. That didn't get blown up. This big ammunition dump exploded about three-hundred yards from where we were. But it was just a lot of small fires. That happened that night before. [shows photograph] Here are some of the natives on the island. Island natives that gathered in the open. [shows photograph] This is our commanding officer, the division commander, General Smith, and he was given a Jap soldier at the airport at Saipan. [Reads a description on photo] "General Smith, Captain McCabe from the 65th Regiment, Jap prisoner Saipan." And these are the hangers, Japanese

hangers. Did you get that? This picture appeared in all the newspapers back home. [shows photograph] Of course, these are Signal Corps pictures I have here. I will hold this tight. This is the way it looked at that airfield that we just captured. Japanese prisoners of war. [shows photograph] From the top of Mount Tapochau, looking towards the end of the island, you can see where the front lines are, where the smoke is. [shows photograph] A Japanese soldier smoking. [shows photograph] And this was [shows photograph], the Fighting 69th just went through there. Those are all Japanese laying there. Did you get those? That battle ended and they stopped. I'm going to give you this. There was no more action. They cleaned up Saipan and that was it. So they were going to go to Tinian.

[holds up magazine article] And I got this story out of this magazine from a neighbor of mine. I'm telling him about what I did on Tinians. And he said, I got an article at home.

He brought this magazine down, and I read it. And I was just astounded because it was word for word. When the Battle of Saipan finished, I was an operations officer. I didn't have to do this. I went down to our Piper cub and asked if there was anyone here who would volunteer to take me over on the island of Tinian? It was still occupied by the Japanese. One guy volunteered. So we flew over there. [looks through magazine] Do I have a map of Tinian here? [shows detailed map drawing] That's the battle lines on Saipan. They don't stand out very much. You can see deep plus. [unclear] 39.38 Here's the island of Tinian. [shows another map drawing] This is the island that I flew around. The Japs were on this island. And I got a scenario here. [points to details written in corner] I'll give you these two copies here.

Q: Okay, I'm going to have to stop and change the tape.

WC: So we had to fly across that water and down here.

Q: Okay, we have a new tape ready. It's in. So Tinian is kind of to the south or to the north of Saipan.

WC: Let's see that was. I don't think they show north and south. This is the island of Tinian. I will try to hold it still. I flew over here. Of course, I had a pilot's license before the war, but I didn't continue it during the war, so I could tell the pilot exactly what I knew he could do. We were about thirty to sixty feet from the shore and we were only about ten feet in the air. That was kind of hard flying and keeping a level flight. So I came along through here and I had the map that showed where these beaches were. These beaches were not beaches. They were

lava rock. And it was about three feet from the water up to the height there. It was not a very good beach to land on because you'd have to be in the water. I'll tell you how they did it now, in a minute.

Then I flew down here to Tinian town, and down at Tinian town, it was fully mined. I looked down into the water, it was just solid with mines in there. I looked up in the hills and there was a big camouflage net. The Japanese were experts on that. You couldn't tell from the top. And there was this British gun, it's about that big around, [gestures about twelve inches in diameter] pointing right at us. I was in a Piper cub, and I said to the pilot, I guess we're going to get blown out of the sky. I turned around and there was a US Navy destroyer about a mile out offshore, so they didn't fire at us. [laughs] We continued on around the island. [points to map] You couldn't land anywhere else; it was too bad. Down here was a beautiful beach, heavily defended. And I looked in there, all these Japs were standing there looking at us with their mouths hanging out. We were so close, we could see them at that point, and they didn't fire a shot. The pilot said, "Let's capture the island." It was so easy. We went up and I said, there's an airfield right here. Shown right here. Right here, there's an airfield. So I said, if there was any aircraft gun at the end of the airfield, go up high and zoom down on it and go past it, I wanted to see if it was knocked out. I could even see that it was a sliding wedge breech block and it was just creased with a burn mark across it. So, it was shot. So we swung around. He said, let's capture the island. We went down and we landed on the airstrip and we were taxiing along and a Jap came out to meet us on a bicycle. And I said to the pilot, jeez, we don't have a white flag. And he didn't have a white flag. And maybe he thinks we're in trouble and he'll take us in and interrogate us. Let's not take a chance. I said to the pilot, I don't know about capturing the island. I don't know until this day whether I could have captured the island or not. So I said, let's go back. He said ok. We went back. When I got back to our command post, I went to Colonel [Robert] Taylor, my commanding officer. I told him the whole story. He said, write it all down and send it up to the 5th Marine Corps. I wrote it all down and sent it up to them. They set up a landing program. Would you believe?; not a man got killed. And it was all because I had made this reconnaissance. They selected this lousy beach to land on. They had a whole convoy of LCVs that came from Saipan down and went all the way down to Tinian town like they were going to land on the town. After they got down there, they radioed back and said, we're here. They had three pontoon bridges they were towing and they towed them into the shore and the Seabees jumped out and tied them on the trees on the shore, these floating dry docks. The Marines in the boats did an about face. They didn't come around

like this. They had the forces lined up backwards and they pulled up alongside the dock. They had to warn them. They got out of the boat, walked ashore. The Japs pulled out of this side and went down the island. Not a man was killed. [laughs] All the Japs went down. This is real high ground down here. They concentrated down here. The people in the town...our Navy, leveled that town of Tinian town, and the people all got out of there. They were all up in the open up behind it. And the Japs went back to the high ground.

Was it the 1st or 3rd or 2nd or 4th? I don't remember. Oh, yeah, it says here. It's so long ago, I don't remember. The 2nd and 4th worked together and the 1st and 3rd worked together. I don't show it here with a landing force, but they captured the island and I didn't pay much attention to it. But afterwards they wrote that citation up and they flew me over to Saipan and pinned a medal on me in a special plane. And they told me to go easy on writing up the operation because the Marine Corps didn't like the Army to get credit for something. [laughs] I was surprised that I was getting a medal for this. Now, you'll find out what it says here. It says [reads a document] "The US Marine Divisions that overwhelmed the Japanese defenders with what Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, commander of the US Navy 5th Fleet, called it probably the most brilliantly conceived and executed amphibious operation of World War II." And I got a medal for it. So it says over here on the next page, [reads document] "American reconnaissance showed that the southern beaches of Tinian town and Asiga Bay were well defended, with dozens of pill boxes and machine guns. Tinian's defenses were formidable. Asiga Bay alone had twenty-three pill boxes and numerous machine guns covering the beaches and their approaches. Reconnaissance all showed that the two small beaches near the northwest tip of the island weren't fortified." And that's where they landed. And I gave them the information. So that's the whole story, I didn't know this until about two years ago, and I was telling a fellow down the street, and he dug out the magazine. He said you are all written up. I said my name isn't in there, but it's in the record. Spruance said it was the most outstanding operation in the Pacific. Some of these things I can give you. I don't want to give you everything.

Q: We'll talk about that.

WC: I'm going to give you these copies here of these pictures that I made. You can have those. Let me see if I got any others. Here's one. These are copies of pictures I showed you. This is at a reunion we had in Buffalo. [shows photograph] All of these guys are dead but me. That's me. And this was a JAG officer of the division, Colonel McDonough [?]. And this is our chaplain of the division, Father

Sadoti [?]. And this was Brainerd Smith [?], one of our officers. That was taken at a reunion in Buffalo.

Q: How long ago?

WC: Oh, maybe eight or nine years ago.

Now, I don't want to go backwards. I'm talking about the island of Saipan. You remember I landed at Makin Island. Well, here's a picture of Makin Island. [shows and points to map] See, this is now getting out of sequence. Hold the edge of that. This is where we landed here. These are where the beaches were. And our artillery was down here and this little lagoon out here, and of course, the direction of the north. I never did figure out whether I was right or what was right, but we finally got it straightened out. Instead of me firing down here, I was out here with the shots. And all I did was just move it over after I found out where they were. You can have that. [shows image] Here's what it looks like when you're going ashore in a landing craft. It's the same beach, and it shows here markers that the troops used when they went in, because it was all trees and rocks in here. You had to pick and choose where you were going to bring in. The Ukiangong Angle on Point it shows there. That's down there on the right. That's where we had our artillery. You can have this here. At the Kwajalein Operation, one of our howitzers was loaned to the Marine Corps, and they had VTU fuses that were defective. [shows photograph] We loaned this gun to them for the Kwajalein Operation and when they fired the shot it blew up inside the gun. A defective fuse. This shows a picture of the gun afterward. We didn't get that gun back. And here's a picture of our artillery by regiment, [shows photograph] which became a battalion, the 106th Field Artillery firing there. I gave you one of these, didn't I?

Q: I don't think so. We could look through this. We're not sure. I don't see it.

WC: I have two here. You couldn't pick this up. This is a recent picture of the airfield at the end of Tinian, and it shows Saipan in the distance. I already showed you these and I gave you those pictures. I made this thing up, too. Were you on this program? [holds up a pamphlet] *Robin Schimager[?] individual record officers, enlisted personnel in New York State military history*. I wrote that up and I was going to send it to him.

Q: That's our form, so he would have sent it to us.

WC: Yeah, well, you can have that there. I wrote that all up. This is a map of Okinawa. [shows map] We're going to go into that also.

Q: You want to talk about that now that you have the map out, or should I hold this map for you?

WC: It's probably hard to show jumping around it. [holds up map, points to where divisions landed] Can you see that? Here's where we landed up here. 3rd Marines, 1st Marines, 27th Division, 96th Division went in here. Shuri Castle. This is Naha, the village here. They leveled that with the Air Force and the Navy, and we swung around and came down the island this way. The commander there, Yahara, [*The Battle for Okinawa by Hiromichi Yahara*] They were excellent officers. If you ever get a chance to get that book, they look back at the history, back in the old days with different commanders in Europe, and they use their tactics and things. So when we landed there, we didn't have a shot fired at us. The Japanese didn't attack us, they let us land. And in Yahara's book, the reason was because they were down in the ground, and they played it cool and they wanted to get everybody ashore in a group. If they fired at us when we were landing, we would have turned around and run away. You see what I mean? So they played it smart and stayed without shooting at anything. They got the whole force landed without any. That's the story I got out of there. So when we landed there, I was surprised that we didn't get any opposition. We ran into the opposition after we were all fully there. We had a lot of ships that were sunk. I was over towards the airfield when a Jap...the clouds were heavy, and I remember a Jap plane revved up. They knew he was up there, but they couldn't see him. He was up by the clouds, and all of a sudden I heard this. [motions a plane coming in sharply towards the ground] He came down off at the end of the runway and went right down into a cruiser right near the bridge. Committed suicide, a suicide plane right down in between it. Big explosion. He came right over my head.

I got back to my outfit. We ended up across the line there with the 27th Division. They were on the left, the 7th Division was on the right of the line, and the 96th Division was in between. The line extended around here. [points at places on map] I can't read those. The 7th Division was on this side. Yonabaru is down here, and the Japanese artillery were here, but they were in caves. And I kind of surmised there was something bad. Because I went up in a Piper Cub, went over there, and you couldn't find any of the Japs or anything during the daytime. They were all in the caves. I saw this revetment, like a ridge, and in front of it was all fresh dirt. Oh, gosh, it must have extended out a mile. They must have dug in there real heavy. That's where the artillery was. They were supporting the Japanese at Shuri Castle. The Japanese line ended up at Shuri. Where the heck is it on here? That is Shuri right there. They were way down in the ground, sixty feet down there, and they were over here at Yonabaru with the artillery. I just believe.

I don't remember the exact date. I think it was May 21, the colonel put me on nights by myself and a telephone operator, and it was around midnight that the Japanese...it's in that book there...I got more out of that book than I did out of our own stuff. What their plans were and everything. They were planning at that time because the monsoon filled the caves with water. They were down sixty-five feet and they couldn't stand it. They had to come out. So when they did, they planned a strategic withdrawal. The infantry was backed up by their artillery. The 7th Regiment they had. They fired shots from the 7th Regiment sporadically because their ammunition was low and they couldn't resupply it. I think I explained that before, didn't I?

Q: Yes.

WC: So that's when I blew up their whole regiment. When they got up there, when the 7th got up there, they found some of the men leaning against a tree, still standing up, and they were dead. The smoke shells kept them from running around someplace because they couldn't see. And the fuse delay caused shells to go in the ground for maybe a half a second and then come back out. It ricocheted back out and then exploded about ten feet above the ground. So you don't have to set a fuse or anything. Using a fuse delay, the shot comes in and it comes up like that, then blows up, so it just spreads. So I had five percent with fuse delays and five percent with white phosphorus. They couldn't see where they were going or anything. It must have been something, because the next day they were coming back through the line and said they wanted to see our machine gun artillery. But I think that was the end of the battle. I got to go home. [unclear] **1.01.02** The Japanese pulled out and surrendered. It was a shame they talked the people into that. [They told them that] they would all be raped by the US soldiers or they'd be killed anyway. They [civilians] went down and some of them jumped off the cliffs down there and committed suicide with some of the Japanese.

Yahara got himself into Japanese clothes. He didn't keep his uniform on. That was how he got out of it. Get this now, it's in there, in that book. He came to the United States before World War II and trained some of our military installations. While we sent people over there on training missions in Japan and places over there. And he was in charge of the operation in northern China when the Japanese went into China there, and then they pulled him out to go into Okinawa. They knew that everything was going to end and they wanted to get as many casualties attributed to the US as possible, because they knew our next move would be up into Japan.

So the island of Tinian was very important because it was flat and that's where they flew the Enola Gay. And what was the other one? Those atomic bombs were flown from there. That's when I didn't know those were out there. And the guys in the airport were taking bets. The war is going to be over in another ten minutes [laughs]. I bet you a thousand dollars on that. They knew that those bombs were going to be dropped.

Q: What was your reaction when you heard about the bombs and their destruction?

WC: You mean Hiroshima?

Q: Yes. And Nagasaki.

WC: I was home at that time. I was on leave, yeah, I had thirty days leave.

Q: That's right. You said that.. What was your reaction to it?

WC: Well, I had no idea we had a nuclear bomb and I thought all my buddies were going to go in and invade Japan. They had everything all set up for invasion of Japan. The military, the army and everything was all set up where the divisions were going to land, everything. And I was very surprised. I thought they would actually go into Japan. When they dropped those two bombs, it just was like a calm set over. I figured that's the end. Everything has come to an end now.

Q: How much longer did you stay in service?

WC: Well, I never did get out. I signed for the reserve when I got out on December 25, 1945 and I immediately signed up for the reserve. I didn't want to break my service. I came back; I think it was probably in my notes there. Colonel Flanagan called me.

Colonel Flanagan said they were going to reinstitute the 27th Division in New York State and would like to have you come up and help us. I said, "I don't want anything to do with the Army anymore. I have had enough" And he said, "I'll tell you what, we'll give you a promotion." I came out as a captain. This is one thing I didn't like about the whole war. We went from 149,000 men when I first started to 6,000. And they kept us together so we couldn't get promoted. We couldn't be promoted because the TO&E [Table of Organization and Equipment] wouldn't allow you to be overstaffed. So they kept us as a unit and it prevented us from going ahead in our life. And even though you accomplished everything, they didn't break up the units. So they reorganized the 27th. And when I came back, I went back to the 106th as a major. And then almost overnight I got a promotion to a lieutenant colonel. I went on to be nominated as adjutant general for the 27th

Division. I was inspector general also. I had a lot of work to do with that. I retired as a lieutenant colonel, but they gave me a full colonel on retirement after I'd retired.

Q: What year did you retire?

WC: 1965. Thirty-five years of service. An officer can't spend any more time than that unless you're a general. I guess they get a few more years. Well, I hope I didn't bore you.

Q: No. How do you think the military affected your life? You spent a good part of it in it. What would you say about your experiences?

WC: I think that what I learned through the whole thing, I would do it over again. It was an education that, whether anybody believes that or not, it was an education to me. I learned an awful lot. It was too bad that I couldn't have moved up because I would have made a lot of changes in the war. They expanded so fast. They had too many men inexperienced and running units and too many lives lost. As I said here, what Spruance said, you know, the Navy and the Marines didn't get along. I don't know whether you knew that or not. Because the Navy is subject to being attacked in their ships, they push the Marines to get their operation over as fast as possible so they're not sitting ducks around there with all their ships. And there was some friction between them, but they did work together. But that's why my CO, when he wrote up my citation, didn't want to agitate the Marines or anybody, so he made it kind of smooth. Even though [because of] what I accomplished, they may not have done what they did. They only gave me a Bronze Star for an operation that turned out to be the best in the Pacific. The background that I had was wasted because I could have put that to good use if I was a higher commander. I was much more experienced in education from the schools I went to. I graduated from the Commander General Staff College, the Field Artillery School of Fort Sill, the Industrial College of the Armed Forces, I went to a jungle training school, I went to a lot of operations with the Marines and the military loading and unloading ships and those schools that I went to in preparation over in Hawaii. I had quite a bit of an educational background.

Q: Do you think it's because you stayed in the field artillery and there wasn't a lot of advancement in that branch?

WC: I wasn't in the infantry. I might not be here today. Those boys were..they lost an awful lot of men in the infantry. I was fortunate I was in the artillery from the beginning and right through. It just bothered me when I saw the lives that were lost taking those islands, which wasn't necessary. The Army and the Marine

Corps operations were different. They're not today. They're much better. Their tactics are much better today than they were then.

Q: What did you do after you left the service?

WC: I went back to the steel plant. I was a supervisor over there. They moved me around quite a bit, a lot of jobs. I was scheduled to go down to their main office in Pennsylvania and move up in line, but my wife didn't want to move. So that's when you level off and you don't go any higher. I felt I was away too much and I had to spend it with my family.

Q: What year did you get married?

WC: 1941. In October, just before the war broke out.

Q: How many children do you have?

WC: I have five. And one of them got to be a major in the National Guard. He lives in Syracuse. I have a son out in Colorado. He has his own business. He went through college, and he's worth a fortune. He owns a big construction company. And he told me he would never build any houses because he says that women can't make up their mind what they want. They want too many changes. When you have a business and they send you a set of plans, that's it. It's already set. You just sit down and do it. He always says that. I stayed with the business and he bought a lot of land and he put up...what's that outfit in California that's in the computer chips? It's a great big company.

Q: Microsoft?

WC: Microsoft. They built two big office buildings. He built two big office buildings in Fort Collins, Colorado. They moved out of California and they're in Colorado. Everybody's leaving California for some reason.

Q: Like they are leaving New York. Are there any other stories or anything you want to relate before we're finished? Do you think you told us everything?

WC: I think I have told us everything, I probably think.

Q: Were you with the 27th Division when General [Ralph] Smith was relieved?

WC: Yes

Q: What did you think of that?

WC: I think it was a sad case. The army has their own way of doing things, and unfortunately, Howlin' Mad Smith [Lieutenant General Holland Smith, Marine]

was the commander over all operations, so he had to do it his way. Well, General [Ralph] Smith of the Army didn't want to do it his way. He didn't want to go through the way the Marines were doing it. So he [Lieutenant General Holland Smith] relieved him [Major General Ralph Smith.] But that shouldn't have ever happened because Smith of the Army had more knowledge of operation and handling men.. I don't think that Howlin' [Holland] Mad Smith commanded anything larger than a regiment until that operation came along and then he was in charge of the whole operation. It was a sad thing that happened. Any other questions?

Q: Did you serve under General [George Wesley Griner, Jr.] Griner? What was your impression of him?

WC: He was very good. I wasn't directly under him then. He was on the island of Saipan when the relief came in, and I was already with the 24th Corps. But I had enough connection with all of the people in the 27th before I went to 24th Corps, and I had an opportunity to see his way of running things compared to General Smith. So he was very excellent in running the 27th Division. It's unfortunate that this problem occurred.

Any other questions?

Q: I was just going to mention the Banzai attack.

WC: Oh, yes, sir. The 105th infantry were on a...where is the Saipan map? I think I may have it here. Okay, let me see now. Sharon Kanoa. [shows map] This is Mount Tapochau. The 105th Infantry had this little sector here. The full Japanese force came down this side of the island. They had their command post up here. And incidentally, I blew up their ammunition dump up there in the first of the operation, and I hit some guns that they had when I went up on the plane to register where we first got there. But they came down here in mass with their bayonets on their rifles and they just went through. The 105th held them. And they just lost an awful lot of men because they didn't care whether they died or not. The Japanese did, and they just kept on coming, no matter how many bullets you had. And Lieutenant Trippy, the guy that was on Makin island with me, they found his body, pistols still in his hand and no bullets left in his gun. He was over there as foreign observer for the 106th Field Artillery at that time, and he lost his life when the Japanese made this attack. And here is the Banzai attack. Any other questions?

Q: Thank you very much, sir.