

**Alexander J. Fiore
Veteran**

**Interviewers
Pat Mangini
Matt Nethercott**

Date and location not recorded

Q: Let's start off with where you were born.

AF: I was born in Canastota, New York April 11, 1921.

Q: Did you complete high school before you entered the service?

AF: Yes, I did.

Q: What did Pearl Harbor mean to you?

AF: Well, when they got the news that Pearl Harbor was being struck, I was in my first year of college and it just meant to me that my life is going to change because I was in that age group, and I decided I was going to draft.

Q: Were you drafted or did you enlist?

AF: No, I enlisted.

Q: What branch of the service?

AF: I enlisted in the Marine Corps.

Q: Is there any particular reason?

AF: Yes, at that time they offered a program which allowed students to go back to college and finish up, and then when they graduated from their college, their chosen college, then they would be called up and sent to their Marine Corps officers training school in Quantico. And that's the reason I joined this, the draft was hot on my neck and I did not want to go to the army.

Q: Did you go through boot camp for the Marines?

AF: Yes, I did. Yet in the beginning the Marine Corps called all reserves up, I was what they called a V-12 program, and they called me up and sent me to Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Pennsylvania where I served for three semesters. We had to have the basic Marine Corps subjects and go off to Kennedy school. I had completed those courses at the college of pharmacy prior to attending Muhlenberg College. So that allowed me to choose the subjects of my choice and the subjects that I choose. At that age I remember that Albany college of pharmacy was a science, math course and here's an opportunity to take philosophy and ethics and English, history and the liberal arts courses. Now I can say this, I took them thinking they were going to be very easy courses, but I can tell you now they were very very difficult.

Q: What was your, besides school, three semesters like at Allentown Pennsylvania?

AF: Well the three semesters were involved in at the college we were regimen and wore the uniform, were up at 6 am. Classes started at 8 o'clock, noontime at my school was at 12, and we marched over in formation, then we'd finish our meals and then that's when I took all the liberal arts courses that I talked about. Including photography, which at that time was my favorite hobby.

Q: What did you do between 6 am and 8 am?

AF: Between 6 am and 8 am, at 6:10 they had us fallout on the break field and we went through a lot of calisthenics at 6:30 were back to the barracks, the dormitories at that time, we referred to them as barracks. We had to clean up and get ourselves into our beds and get the rooms ready for inspection. Then at 8 o'clock, at 7:15 to march over for breakfast.

Q: Did you ever experience any actual combat in the war?

AF: No, I landed in Okinawa. One week before the war ended and we were waiting for further assignment, then the war ended.

Q: What was Okinawa like?

AF: Well it was, when I was there, muddy and it was warm but you couldn't drive a vehicle down a muddy road because you'd sink right up to the axles and you'd have to have a tractor pull them out. I remember one night I put my golden box down, I get up in the morning, six inches of water under my bunk, all my clothes were all wet and I had to put them on all wet.

Q: Did you ever achieve a rating when in the Marine Corps?

AF: Yes, when I graduated from OCS I was commissioned second task and then eventually I made first lieutenant.

Q: What is a G2 rating?

AF: G2, what it means, in the Marine Corps is intelligence, intelligence section.

Q: Other than Okinawa, were you in any other parts of the South Pacific?

AF: Yes, we took off on a troop ship to San Diego, 30 days on the water and stopped a couple of days in Hawaii and stopped a couple of days in Kwajalein and then we ended up on Guam. And then from there I was transferred to Guam. After that I was assigned to North China Where I joined the 21st division and I joined it in Okinawa, our division was supposed to go to North China, had to do combat landing on the shore which we did, then we did not know it was the Japanese 43rd army was going to surrender peacefully or put up the resistance. They just walked the shore.

Q: What was your job in the Marine Corps?

AF: When I was in the Marine Corps I graduated from OCS, they gave me choices. My first choice was to go to flying school. But you have to be a Commission officer for 1 year in the Marine Corps before you can be eligible for flying school. But then I went in to the artillery, because my father was in the artillery, he kept writing to me saying, "get in the artillery you're 20 miles behind the lines." And so I put it for auxiliary. Then I was told my Graduation date did not coincide with the date where the army started their artillery

school and then the Marine Corps had a specialized school it sent everyone else from the Navy over to the Army. So the Colonel said to me we need chemical warfare officers and you got a background in chemistry. He said we'd like to transfer you to Edgewood Arsenal, Maryland for 6 weeks to the chemical and biological warfare school. So I would detach from the Marine Corps for 6 weeks in set up they would add me to Arsenal. They're very being thought that the Japanese were going to launch an all-out death with gas warfare attack on the islands because gas in those days was heavier than air, dropped to the bottom, colorless, odorless and tasteless. And their perfect targets, you have perfect gas for chemical warfare because everybody would be dead but all the equipment would all remain. Now the only way you could get the gas is we used to put a patch on our sleeve, if the patch turned colors, you were in a gassed area. But by that time you were in tough shape.

Q: What did they teach you at the chemical and biological warfare school besides gas?

AF: We talked about biological with anthrax, smallpox, they taught us about the Germans had a what was called a gene series of gasses and I described what they were, and mustard gas and phosgene.

Q: Were you ever injured during your duty with the Marine Corps?

AF: Yes, I was injured during training at Parris Island. We were running the obstacle course and they had stumps covered with barb wire that you had to dive in and out of, someone behind me tripped me, you know he didn't mean to but he tripped me and I fell onto the stump with barb wire and I had a pretty good gouge in my left hip. They had to hospitalize me for a week.

Q: Did you get the Purple Heart?

AF: No, the Purple Heart is for war in combat. I think I deserved it but I didn't get it.

Q: Were all of the islands that you went to in the South Pacific pretty much similar condition-wise?

AF: I think, the few that I saw, they were tropical islands. Guam was a beautiful island, about 5 miles wide and about 21 miles long. I got a chance to view it from the air.

Q: Did you have any leadership roles within your unit?

AF: Well they assigned me to the G-2 section because they needed officers in there to accept the surrender of the Japanese 43 army and my particular duty was, I was in charge of the office making assignments for the personnel. But in particular I was assigned to go out to a British country club, they had a beautiful Corporal Marines club out there and we had the Japanese, we met with the Japanese there at 10 o'clock, gave them instructions about what they had to and then they asked me to go out to the race course to accept the tanks, and they had hundreds of tanks, and we wanted them to put them a foot apart. Just one tank driver got in there about 2 feet apart and the commander of the Japanese tank, just got up and beat him, ruthlessly. That's how discipline they were. I do remember talking to the commander of the tank, he was a graduate of the Japanese war college. He said, "You think the Japanese were bad. Right now the United States has joined forces with Germany and Italy to go after the communists because they're the real threat."

Q: Were you awarded any medals?

AF: Yes, I was awarded the Bronze Star.

Q: How exactly do you earn a Bronze Star?

AF: One of the ways you can earn a Bronze Star is in combat, my grandfather did, or for performing extraordinary services.

Q: Did you earn yours with extraordinary services?

AF: Yes, extraordinary with the office.

Q: What did those services include?

AF: Well, I was classified as a border battle clerk. Information came into my need and onto my desk and I was taught that information for a troop movement on a plastic sheet on the wall and then everybody sent out a newsletter to all the battalions and companies and forgot to ask what was going on in headquarters. Just to pass the word around.

Q: What other unusual duties did you perform?

AF: Well, when we got there I remember we had a very fine Japanese interpreter, whose parents came to the United States in the latter part of the 30's and he went to school here so he spoke very very good English. On one occasion I kept a little later than the usual Japanese contingent, we had some work to do and then I let him go and he had to walk back to what they called in those days a great big warehouse, that's where we put all the Japanese. And then I left about 5 minutes later, as I was leaving, driving down the street I saw the crowd of Chinese people gathered around this person, beating him terribly and then I recognized it was Tokimoto being beaten. He was a fine young man and so I had to move in and break up the fight and then let them go home. I might have had it this time, when we arrived there the Chinese were taking reprisals on the Japanese to such an extent that they would go into their home and beat them up, go into their shops and beat them up, destroy their products, break their windows so we had to get several Chinese interpreters, one was Captain Wayin and one was Captain Ondo, we put them on the back of the truck with a loudspeaker. Telling the Chinese to cease and desist. We would take care of the Japanese when the time came. The time came in January when we had accepted all their materials and then we would repatriate all of the Chinese, Japanese families and military, we'd put them on an LST landing ship tank and we'd put 3,000 on board 1 ship and send them back to a place in Sasebo, Japan. And all we would give them was the clothing they wore, a handbag so they can take their things with them and one hundred dollars equal to American money in jewelry or money. And that took us several to do that. We did treat the prisoners, I thought, quite well. The civilians we put into this big warehouse and they had their own apartments, own rooms, even with the children that slept in there, we fed them quite well.

Q: Do you have any other last experiences from your tour duty with the Marine Corps?

AF: My lasting experience was, one day, when we first arrived there was a notice on the bulletin board with anybody interested in learning Chinese, to report down to the YMCA at 4:30 for an hour lecture and so I decided I wanted to learn Chinese, so down I went. There were several hundred Marines attending and it was 5 days a week, get down there

by 4:30. Eventually there came a time when the crowd dwindled and dwindled and dwindled till I was the last one, only one to arrive for the last lesson. And my teacher said to me, "If you would like a lesson I will give you a personal lesson." So, I said fine. Then she was very very pretty and attractive Chinese girl, at that time she was a graduate of Yenching University, now known as an American University in China. I asked her if I could take her home and she said, "no you may walk me home, providing you do not go in the Jeep" and I said, "why is that?" and she said, "I do not want to be known as a Jeep girl." When I got to the house, it was inquisitive to find out how the Chinese live. So I said to her, "May I come in?" Her answer was, "you may remain here, I will ask my father." She went in the house, came back out and said, "my father said you may enter" and that was the beginning of a very good friendship. I dated this girl, I never dated her alone, I always had to have a brother or a sister go with us and I had a buddy that I fixed up the sister with but eventually he did not want to go anymore. But those are the certain that there are well different people. Now I lost contact with him after I left China, discharged. In 1984, we were traveling around the world, my wife and I, and I was telling the Chinese civilians about my experience in China, in World War II and I said I lost contact with this Chen family. He said, "Where were you stationed?" I told him in Tianjin. He said, "I'm from there." He said, "Do you remember the address?" And I did remember the address, 111 Xian Ting road in Tianjin. He said, "I'll look it up for you." My gosh, about a month later I get a letter from China. And didn't you know he chased that family down and made contact. She wrote to me and we became united in the mail and a matter of fact a couple years ago she was visiting her daughter here in the United States and they spent a week with us at our home, she and her husband.

Q: What was your company made up of, people wise? Like about how many interpreters or infantry people?

AF: Well, to begin with the 1st Marine Division would reinforce, that consist of about 27 thousand Marines. Their broken down into regiments and they were stationed all over the city, now Tianjin was known as the international city because various parts of the city were built by the countries they represented, in other words our headquarters decided was build it in the attendant section and the attendant section was modeled after their buildings in Italy and even named like Via Marco Polo for example. The British sections called Race Course road. But in my section we had quite a few of I'd say of maybe half a dozen interpreters who spoke Chinese but mostly we had the Japanese who spoke English. One fella came in and said, "Good morning lieutenant." And I'd look up at him and say "Yes, what can I do for you?" and he said, "I want to introduce myself. I am leading private..." whatever his name was at that time. And I said, "Gee you speak beautiful English. Where'd you learn that?" He said, "I'm a graduate of Boston University, class of 1939." He spoke perfect English. But every morning we would meet with the Japanese, the Nationalists, at that time, Nationalists army of Chinese nationality, and with the police and exchange information about what happened during the night. For example, one time the police said, at the meeting, "we have a couple of Marines in jail for starting a fight in a bar." And what we would, we decided that they should stay there until the afternoon. Then I was supposed to go and get them out, which I did. The prisons in China, there were bars in front of the cave, just worse conditions than you would possibly think of. And boy were they glad to see me, they said, "lieutenant we're so glad to see you." I said, "Well don't you get into a fight again,

otherwise you can end up here for longer than this, long as overnight.” But then the regiments were broken down into 3 battalions, battalions broken-down into companies and companies were broken-down into platoons, platoons is the smallest unit, about 55 enlisted men and one second lieutenant in charge.

Q: Why did you stay in the Marine Corps until 1952?

AF: Well, I was discharged in 1946 and interesting enough, I was at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, I got a letter from headquarters at marine Corps saying that if I would re-enlist they would send me to Pensacola, to the flying school, which was my first request because I had served all my year as a second lieutenant. But then the fever was to get out, I didn't, I had not finished my college education and so I got out of the service, but I stayed in the reserves, went back to college and I finished up and became a pharmacist and then practice for a couple years and then the Korean War broke out and I got called back to active duty.

Q: Did you serve in Korea?

AF: No, I did not serve in Korea, I served as an instructor at Quantico, that's the home base of the officers' training program. When I took the job at that time, it was in the three sections. We went through 7,000 second lieutenants in 4 months during a hot, hot summer. And I had to make sure that they had hot chow in the field, they had trucks waiting for them to be transported from place to place, that they had classrooms assigned to them and logistics is what I had, I had a competent staff. Only once did we have 2 classes going in the same classroom, one day.

Q: Do you have anything else you would like to add to your story?

AF: Well, I'd like to say this, as far as my experience in the Marine Corps in the Reserves. First of all, at the time I went in and the draft was on my neck, the Military was the last place I wanted to go. But when I got in the Marine Corps, I met fine people from all around the country. When I got discharged from the Navy yard, I left with tears in my eyes. And the same thing happened when they called me in for the Korean War, met all new friends and my wife was with me at that time, so she had a 1 year to 18 months of military living. And my daughter was born in the Marine Corps. I think to sum it all up, I got out of the Marine Corps more than what they got out of me.

Q: What do you mean by that; What types of lessons did you learn?

AF: Well, lessons in discipline. And I was taught a lesson one time, my Colonel taught me to always back up my men, for example I was in the G-2 section and we had the only car in North China. From habit I would have the driver, who was a Chinese student driver, pick us up and go to the country club. Well one night it was New Year's Eve, a change from the left hand side of the road to the right hand side of the road and Wo, my Chinese driver, didn't get to work. We got a military police chief, so when that happened it was the General's car, it got all smashed up. The Colonel called me in, he asked me, he said, "Who gave you permission to use that car?" I said, "No one sir. But I had been using it lately." He said, "Alright, take that automotive transport and have it repaired. And when the Chief of Staff from the Marine Corps called you in and asks you who gave you permission to use that car." He said, "You tell him Colonel Masters gave you

permission. Lieutenant, never forget, always backup your men.” And he did, he saved me.

Q: Who was Colonel Masters?

AF: Colonel Masters, he and his brother were both Lieutenant Colonels and he was head of the G-2 section, Colonel Masters was. And his brother was head of the fifth Marines down in Cancun, a port on the Coast side.

Narrator: Very interesting.

AF: If you’d like to join the Marine Corps, I may arrange to get you in.

Narrator: It’s alright, I went through a week with Marines.

AF: Well, thank you.

Narrator: Thank you.

AF: I hope this serves some purpose.

Narrator: It does.