

**Paul Elisha
Veteran**

**Robert von Hasseln
Interviewer**

**New York Division of Military and Naval Affairs Headquarters
Latham, NY
July 16, 2001**

PE: He got a raw deal and all the rest of it. And then in the mail, I got something which was very, ...he didn't realize it at the time, but remember Carlson's Raiders? [hands an article to interviewer]

RVH: Right.

PE: The landing on Makin Island?

RVH: Mm-hmm.

PE: Well, that's what led to the formation of my unit.

RVH: Really?

PE: [refers to article] Because that's how Jimmy Roosevelt came to train us. They formed the unit and put us together at Camp Pendleton where Jimmy Roosevelt and the Raiders were. One of the things that came out of that commando raid was the idea that for full-scale landings, they needed a unit that could go in and coordinate all the needs and get the word back to the ships. So they formed the 75th JASCO [Joint Assault Signal Company] So as a piece of history for me, it was very interesting. I have to know the parameters before the tape starts to roll.

WC: Actually, it's rolling.

PE: Oh, I should have realized.

RVH: Wayne's very good at this.

WC: We don't want to miss anything.

RVH: There you go. Okay. Go ahead, if you would.

PE: Well, where do we leave off, by the way?

RVH: I reviewed the tape. I believe we left off, you had just taken Makin.

PE: OK, we had taken Makin. Well, this actually has some relevance where we start. Because thinking back, it was the original landing. We landed on Makin in November 1943. I can't remember the date of the first Makin raid that Carlson's Raiders made, but that raid was really the kickoff to starting the trek back through a lot of the tropical islands, in I guess what they called, the Mid-Pacific area. You had the South Pacific and the North Pacific and the Mid-Pacific campaign. Out of that raid came the feeling by both Navy, Marine and Army people that if they were going to do any large-scale landings, they needed a unit that to coordinate all of the things that went into the landing, and send the word back to the commandants on the ships so they knew whether they had to lay down fire, send in planes, more supplies, logistics, medical things, whatever they needed. And out of that came the idea of a Joint Assault Signal Company, which the 75th JASCO was.

RVH: Who did they report to? Where were they in the chain of command?

PE: Actually, we reported to the commandant of the flotilla, whoever was the supreme commander of the operation. We were under that commander's direct control. Once ashore, we had to coordinate with the operational commander, whoever he was. Because his needs came first. But we were not under any of those commands because at some point, once the initial landing phase was secured, they pulled us out to go make another landing like that. And so we were never around for...on the larger operations, we didn't hang around for the happy ending, so to speak. Makin and Kwajalein only took a few days. So, we went in with everybody and came out when it was over. But on Leyte, Luzon, Okinawa, the battles went on much longer than we stayed.

RVH: So how many landings were you involved in?

PE: Well, believe it or not, the baptism of this unit came not at all in the tropics. After all of that and all of our training, our first operation actually was in the Aleutians at Attu in May of 1943. They told us when we went in that it was going to be a week or two at the most. The whole thing would be a wash. We'd be out of there. Of course, it turned out to be quite a different story; it took a couple of months. And a lot of the men that went in there really suffered badly because of bad planning. Mostly frostbite, things like that.

RVH: Was your particular unit well trained for that?

PE: Not at all. Not at all. When we trained, we trained in Southern California. We were going to be taking atolls in the Pacific. Somebody said, well, we need to give these guys some real action. They were putting together the Attu move. They attached us to the 7th

Division and we went up to Kiska, which almost was a debacle. If you've read *Bridge to Victory* [:*The Story of the Reconquest of the Aleutians by Howard Handleman*], the book, you know.

RVH: How many other units like yours were there?

PE: At that time, we were it. As a matter of fact, the interesting thing was that a lot of us felt sort of cheated. We heard that we were going to go into a couple of actions, go back and be ensconced in California and train everybody else. We never did get to do that. I guess one story that we heard was that we got so good at it that they couldn't let us go.

RVH: So first was Attu, then it was?

PE: Kiska. Which turned out to be fine because there was nobody there. The Japanese had all been pulled out. After Attu, we went back to California and refitted for Kiska. After Kiska, we went straight down to Hawaii and began more training. That was the preparation for Makin. Marines went into Tarawa, and ninety miles away was Makin Atoll. The 165th Infantry Regiment, which was part of the 27th, went in to take Makin, and we went with them.

RVH: What was the following operation for you after Makin?

PE: Kwajalein, Marshall Islands.

RVH: What was that like?

PE: That was like Makin, only worse. [laughs] We did Makin in like two days, just about. It took us two days, for which Holland "Mad" Smith screamed and hollered and said we took one day too long. As it turned out, it was a good operation. We didn't lose as many men as we might have. The Navy screwed up mightily on Makin, as they did on Tarawa. They misjudged the tides. If you know anything about the Pacific, an atoll is formed by several little islands around a lagoon. If you wanted to get in and out of that lagoon, you had to know the tides pretty well, because if the tide went down beyond a certain point, the lagoon became inaccessible. What happened at Makin, as it did at Tarawa, was they misjudged the tide by several hours. The Higgins boats went in and scraped on the coral reefs. They didn't want to rip the bottoms out, so they dropped the ramps right there at the reef, let us off in water about up to here [gestures chest high] and we had to go several hundred yards to shore. At the bombings and the shellings, they later learned that the Japanese had built tremendous reinforcements on these islands. The shelling didn't do a great deal to destroy them. So, some of these were still manned with machine guns, with crossfire. When we got close to shore, they opened up. The only thing that saved me at Makin was the radio I was carrying. It was wrapped in rubber to keep it from getting all

wet on the landing. And I stepped in a shell hole. The guys on either side of me got hit. I went down and came up hanging on to the radio, past the line of fire. I looked back and saw all these guys getting it. [gestures being hit in the chest] But that was the only thing that saved me at Makin.

RVH: You said Kwajalein was like Makin but worse.

PE: Kwajalein was a larger island than Makin. It was sort of in the shape of a T, as I recall. The object was they were going to land one group down at one end, one group down at the other, and they were going to work toward each other, cut the Japanese in half, something like that. It never goes according to plan somehow on these things because you really never knew what the enemy was going to do. It took us about three and a half days on Kwajalein. It was the first place I ever saw the use of flamethrowers because they were really dug in. They had these things dug right down into the sand with coconut logs and coral and stuff all over them. And you just couldn't root them out. We went along. We weren't supposed to root them out, of course, we were communications. But because the island was so small, there really was no room for a lot of artillery. They brought some tank tread, what do they call them, Amtrak [amphibious tractor], in with some heavy stuff. But really, they used naval bombardment right up the coast as we went. And our people were the spotters for that.

RVH: Your primary job was as a radio man?

PE: I was a radio operator, yeah.

RVH: What were your feelings on these islands?

PE: Well, the first one was the scariest. Attu was apart. Even though we'd been through Attu and they told us we were veterans now, it was a whole different scene. On Attu, there wasn't a single tree in the Aleutians. But there, there was underbrush, palm trees, all the rest of it. Cover. And the Japanese who had been living there for a couple of years before we got there were very adept at using that. They used all kinds of tricks. We were told about a lot of the tricks that might be used, but you still didn't know them until you saw them. At night particularly, they used little phrases like, hey Joe, hey Joe, to get you to answer or come out. We later learned that we operated purely with taps, hand signals, everything, but never talked at night. We were also told not to shoot because that gave away your position. So at night, most of us had large trench knives we kept handy just in case and sometimes people used them. But the nighttime was the worst because of infiltration, really. They were very adept at that.

RVH: What were you sleeping in? How did you get to sleep?

PE: On the ground.

RVH: Because the constant worry about?

PE: Well, there was always somebody up, somebody dozing, somebody up, somebody dozing. We dug in a radio emplacement somewhere and worked from that. Usually we used what they called an SCR-7. It's been a long time, [to remember] the numbers. It was about the size of a suitcase. It was on two folding legs, the lid plopped down, and that was your workspace. The set faced you in the rest of the suitcase. And then you had a cable going to a generator, which you turned. [gestures bicycling his arms] That was the worst job of the lot. We lost several people because the generator let out a squeal whenever you transmitted and that gave away your position. Usually we used people who ordinarily were Jeep drivers, company clerks, people like that. When we went ashore, they ended up as generator drivers. They didn't like it because they were sitting ducks. We could lie down like this [gestures lying on his side] and do the radio or the voice, whichever. But whoever was on the generator was up there cranking away. That was not an enviable position to be in.

RVH: So you were at Kwajalein, you were there for about how long?

PE: I'd say four or five days, Kwajalein was over. It was interesting ,because later when I read some of the reports by Marines, observers and PR people, they always played down Army operations by comparison. We even doubted the final figures that the Army people came up with. They told us when we went in, there were like two thousand Japanese on Kwajalein. But I remember when we left that island, we walked almost three quarters of a mile or so down to where the boats picked us up. There was this makeshift road, and alongside that road, the bodies were stacked four and five high like cordwood, many of them burned beyond recognition from the flamethrowers. But it looked more like three times as many as they said were on there. And as I recall, I think there may have been maybe half a dozen survivors out of that operation. Most of them committed suicide. You always knew when the banzai attacks began that they [Japanese] figured it was over. They just came at you.

RVH: Were you ever at the receiving end of one of those?

PE: Yeah. On Kwajalein, we were. On Attu, there was a banzai charge of sorts, but they were in worse shape than we were, and there weren't enough of them to really make it a horrendous affair. They tried.

RVH: So after Kwajalein, you went back to Hawaii?

PE: No, we took a rest. [laughs] They told us we were going to take a rest. We went to New Guinea. And MacArthur's people were doing the island hops, the Solomons, New Guinea, Buna [Papua New Guinea], all that way. They took Hollandia [now Jayapura] [western New Guinea/Indonesia] and set up a large supply base there, which we landed on. That was when they decided on the leapfrog approach, not to try to take everything. And they tried what they called a process of containment. So, they launched a strike at the northern end of New Guinea, drove the Japanese back into the interior, and set up a perimeter like Hollandia this way, and then Aitape [Papua New Guinea] in the northern end that way. They sent patrols out on that perimeter from time to time just to keep the Japanese back and let them know we were there, et cetera. The famed Australian 7th Brigade, the Rats of Tobruk, were pulled out of Tobruk after it fell. And they said they were sending them home, but they sent them there to do patrols for R&R. They took a group of us and two of us were sent with each squad that went out on patrol as communications. So, we went out with the Australian 7th Brigade members at Aitape.

RVH: What were they like?

PE: They were wonderful guys. Fearless. No matter what happened when we were on patrol, they stopped every afternoon, checked their watch, and stopped at four o'clock for tea. They took out their little burners and put the tea on. They were sitting on their haunches drinking tea. All of a sudden, you heard a rustle or something in the trees. Somebody turned around with one of those little Sten guns that they had, and [gestures a rapid bullet fire noise] brrrrt at the tree. A Japanese person fell out of it. Then went back to making tea again. [laughs]

RVH: How did they take to the Yanks?

PE: We got along pretty well, except they told us we were stupid and we didn't know how to drink beer. Because they drank it warm. They drank warm beer. And of course, Americans had to have cold beer.

RVH: So, you were in R&R for?

PE: I'd say the better part of a month or so. Then they pulled us out of that. We joined a large force. I'm not sure of the dates; it's been a long time. But we stayed there until November. And in November of 1944, we went into Leyte.

RVH: What was that like?

PE: That was an interesting one. That was big. It was really big. Also, that was where I was wounded by a kamikaze plane that dove into an ammunition dump. You may recall, if you've read any of the history of the Philippines invasion. Just two days, I think, after

we landed there, The Japanese sent a fleet up through the straits there to hit the invasion force. They dumped everything on the beach, pulled the LSTs, everybody else out, and went out to meet them. The aircraft carriers were gone. We had just a couple of destroyers cruising offshore. The Japanese pretty much had the air over the island to themselves, and sent kamikazes in.

RVH: Was this your first experience with kamikazes?

PE: Yeah, it was the very first one. When they left, this one LST asked for a couple of bulldozers and stuff. They pulled everything out of the belly of this LST, dumped it on the beach and left. So here was this huge dump of ammunition, and we were just across the road. We'd set up our radio and stuff, the command post. All of a sudden, we heard the siren and the code red for a raid. They came in, and one of them just dove right down into that pile, and all hell went up. We went up in the air, the radio, everything else. This arm [gestures to his left] was broken. This arm had just what they called a greenstick fracture, but I could move it. You couldn't do anything. I remember another guy and I laid behind a stack of number ten rations. It was about four cartons this way and about that high. [gestures about a foot and a half wide by two and six feet tall] We just laid behind it for hours. The stuff was just going. [gestures stuff flying back and forth] You didn't dare stand up. Then finally, I remember a warrant officer came along with two other men. He said, There's a cart loaded with 155mm shells over there. We have to get that the hell out of there because if that blows, everything is going to go. So the four of us with the warrant officer went and pushed this thing. There was a group of black transport troops who were unloading and one of them came and helped us move that thing. I've always wondered what became of him because without him we never would have done it. I'm sure nobody ever wrote him up in a book. But we got it moved. Then we just threw ourselves back down behind those number ten rations and waited for the stuff to stop. I ended up in a field hospital with both arms in splints. About four or five days later, one of my buddies came in and he said, God, you don't want to get stuck here. You better hurry back. We were getting ready to go to Luzon.. I can't explain this, but there is a feeling that if you stayed with your own group, you were better off than if you were a free agent out there somewhere. God knows what would have happened to you. It's like the devil you know is better than the devil you don't. So I went AWOL from the hospital.

RVH: With a broken arm?

PE: Yeah. I went back and went into Luzon. [laughs]

RVH: You landed with a broken arm?

PE: Oh, yeah. Well, it was healing. It was wrapped and then they splinted it.

RVH: Your CO didn't have a problem with that?

PE: I had the feeling my CO was trying to kill me anyway. [laughs] I remember the night before we went down to get on the ship to go to Luzon, I was sitting on a cot. By then we had set up tents. The battle for Leyte was practically over. We were down near the beach. He came in and he threw this thing at me, which turned out to be a Purple Heart medal. He said, here. I don't know why they're giving you this. Don't think that arm is going to get you out of anything. That'll teach you to go AWOL.

RVH: You didn't get along with your commanding officer?

PE: No, I didn't.

RVH: Earlier you mentioned the sergeant.

PE: Oh yeah, Elmer Kaminski [?].

RVH: Was he with you all through?

PE: All of them. He went right through to the end. Made it. Most of us wouldn't have made it without him.

RVH: What was it about him?

PE: Tremendously cool under all conditions. Kept his head. Was able to get along with the brass, but used his own sense of what was right and what was wrong to get the best deal for his men, always.

RVH: And the men appreciated that?

PE: Oh, tremendously. He was one in a million. He really was.

RVH: So after Luzon?

PE: Up to that time, Luzon was the toughest. It took the longest. At first, we were told it was going to be a blitz operation. We went into Lingayen Gulf, I think it was. We didn't go up to where Manila was, we went up north. If you've ever seen a map of Luzon, there are two ranges of hills just back in from the coast. There's a valley that goes straight down into Manila. Originally, the whole invasion force was to land and blitz down with tanks and everything right down that valley, split the island, and take Manila. There had been a rumor that because the rich plantation owners had plantations in that valley, that [the plan] was changed. We don't know. But of course, MacArthur was with a lot of people at Luzon. And anyway, the plan was changed and they went down the ranges of hills. Outside of Baguio, there was one hill where we did fire spotting. That hill was

taken and retaken three or four different times. I always felt there were a lot of unnecessary casualties at Luzon.

RVH: Why do you think that?

PE: Well, because I think it could have been done differently. But that's only from a hindsight perspective.

RVH: What's your view of MacArthur?

PE: I think it's overblown. He had a tremendous PR staff, but I personally witnessed what turned out to be one of the big publicity things of the war. There was a historic newsreel of MacArthur landing at Leyte, keeping his promise, "I shall return," and then coming ashore. Everybody with the guns at the ready, and then he stopped on the beach. There was this body of a dead Japanese [soldier]. He kicked it over and said, "That's the way we like to see them." Several of us had just come back. They had finally taken the town of Tacloban where the airstrip was. That was the first priority. That was when we were supposed to be pulled out. They had to land planes there so they could bomb the rest of the Philippines and Okinawa. They finally took that airstrip in Tacloban, and we were relieved. They said, go back to get some hot meals and showers. We were standing on the beach watching a bulldozer push sand out into the surf. There was a little knot of men and stuff. Kaminski, our sergeant, asked, what's going on here? What are they doing there? He said, they're pushing sand out so the general won't get his feet too wet when he comes ashore. And they pushed this thing out there. We saw this boat waiting offshore. It came up and they dropped the thing. These guys came off with Thompson machine guns at the ready with MacArthur behind them. Just before that happened, there were a whole bunch of photographers, press people, PIOs, public information officers and stuff. This major came down and shooed everybody off to one side. He said, the general does not like this profile. Go to that side. They set the whole thing up. I could just see Willie and Joe [cartoon infantry soldier characters created in 1940 by Bill Mauldin] and what they would have said.

RVH: So after Luzon?

PE: After Luzon, we prepared for Okinawa.

RVH: What were your thoughts, what was the general thinking about Okinawa prior to landing?

PE: We were told it was going to be a rough one. We knew it was going to be. First of all, it was different from any of the other islands. It was in the Northern Pacific and mountainous in topography. They [Japanese] had had a long time. They were closer to

home. They had big, and I mean big guns. We were told that some of the guns on Okinawa were 220mm or something like that. I mean, big ones. They had them on rails in caves that they took out to use. We were told that it was heavily fortified, and they were right. It was. It was really a tremendous battle for Okinawa.

RVH: You landed with who?

PE: I personally landed with the 2nd Marine Division. We were attached to them for the landing. Some of my unit went with the 43rd Infantry Division, which also landed. There was sort of a pincer movement there. There were landings on different parts of the island. Some of us were attached to the 2nd Marines for the landing to provide their communications.

RVH: So how did you generally get along with the Marines?

PE: We got along fine, largely because we had trained with them at Pendleton. So we were used to Marines. We got some flak from them. Usually aboard ship when you were going somewhere, you got flak. Once you got ashore, everybody was in the same mess and you depended on each other. And hey, they were courageous people. So were we. We tended to have it better than most GIs on board ships going to places because of our communications background. Often we were assigned extra communications duties on the bridge when we went aboard ship. So that gave us access to better food, things of that sort while you were on. We got out of the hold where everybody else [stayed].

RVH: So, Okinawa was a tough landing?

PE: It was the toughest of any that I recall. There was heavy shelling going in. There were mortars coming down. I know I read one official account that said that it wasn't so bad that they let them land and then [hit them]. I'd like to have seen what it was like if it wasn't. It was a bad landing. They were all bad landings, but good if you walked away from them.

RVH: How long were you on Okinawa?

PE: I was on Okinawa, I would say, a couple of weeks. After I was there a few days, we got pulled back for rest and a hot meal. I had an interesting experience because I also served in a dual capacity with the unit. I had been asked to be a combat correspondent for *Yank* Magazine since I was on the scene of these things and they needed somebody. While we got pulled back on Okinawa, the CO____

RVH: We need to change the tape.

PE: Oh, we were talking about Okinawa. When we got pulled back, I got called to the CO's office. He said, I'm going to need you for a couple of days. I said, what for? He said, it seems there's this reporter, Ernie Pyle, here. They need somebody to take him around to the different units around the island for interviews. So while he's on this side of the island, you're it. Next thing I knew, I went down and they introduced me to this little guy, and it was Ernie Pyle. That Ernie Pyle.

RVH: How was he?

PE: Oh, he was great. I spent two days with him. We talked a lot, of course. Took him to some of the different outfits. We had a Jeep and a driver, and he interviewed them [GIs]. And as a matter of fact, I was with him when he got on the boat. They sent a small party over to this small island called Iejima, which was just off of Okinawa. He thought that was an interesting thing to go on because they told him it was just going to be a small operation. They didn't even know if there was anybody over there. Just a few people were going to mop it up. I helped him put his stuff on the boat when he went. A sniper killed him [on Iejima].

RVH: What endeared Ernie Pyle to the GIs?

PE: Oh, he was so much like the ordinary GI. First of all, he hated being everywhere he went. He really didn't like it at all. But he did it. It was one of those things, he did it because he had to. He rarely, only if it was in the context of setting the stage for what he was doing, talked to officers. He was really the enlisted man's journalist. He talked to ordinary dogfaces. And they loved him for it because he told it like it was. I remember on one of the treks when I was taking him from one place to another, we got to talking and he asked, what are you going to do when you get out of here when this is over? I said, I didn't know, probably go on with my writing and stuff. He said, check out Indiana University, a great school, it's really good. Well, as it turned out, when I got out of the service, I sent four letters of application. One to Northwestern, one to University of Kentucky, one to NYU, and one to Indiana. I said the first one that accepts me, that's where I'll go. And Indiana accepted me [first]. I was the first recipient of the Sigma Delta Chi Ernie Pyle Memorial Award for reporting at Indiana University. I sat at his desk at the *Indiana University Daily Student* in my senior year. So there's an eerie connection that I have with Ernie Pyle.

RVH: What was it like being a reporter for *Yank* Magazine?

PE: Well, if you were a GI and you were a reporter, it wasn't like being a correspondent like those people were. You still had to do what you had to do. As a matter of fact, some

of the officers looked at it as if you were looking to get something extra special. Who do you think you are? You know, that sort of thing.

RVH: Did you get a byline?

PE: Oh, yeah. I got a byline. I still have my letter of commendation from when it was over. It says, "we'll still be tearing up the mag from Honolulu, but you guys have done a great job and we thank you for it", et cetera.

RVH: Any restrictions as a reporter?

PE: Sure. You were censored. We received a set of instructions of what not to write, and you were supposed to follow them. We pretty much did. You know, we weren't out to scoop the U.S. Army in those days. There were some really strong differences then there were, let's say, in Vietnam and those wars. Everybody really believed in that war [WWII]. And you didn't want to do anything to foul it up. You did what you had to do. I think even among civilian correspondents who covered it, that was pretty much the rule.

RVH: Did you interact much with civilian correspondents?

PE: I got to meet some of them. But, they're very hazy right now. You have to understand that there wasn't a great deal...see, this was the thing. With Ernie Pyle, he sought out enlisted men to talk to. The average war correspondent during World War II went with the brass. They got their briefings. They weren't allowed that close to the action, really. I would say that D-Day was probably the most participatory action they got into.

RVH: Once Okinawa was finished, where____

PE: We went back to Luzon, actually outside of Manila. They put us into a tent encampment there. We were waiting for orders. We began map readings. We were restricted to the encampment. They ringed us with barbed wire and sent MPs in to guard the area. Once you started looking at maps of the next place you were going to go, that became sensitive. We were reading maps of Tokyo Harbor when the bomb was dropped.

RVH: Where were you when you heard that news?

PE: Outside of Manila in tents.

RVH: Did you understand, did the average GI understand what had actually happened?

PE: Oh, yeah. We knew. The word went like wildfire. But particularly for us, we were again going to be in the first wave to land. We were going to be the communications people for that landing. We would have gone right into Tokyo.

RVH: What are your sentiments about the decision to drop the bomb?

PE: I have never had any other feeling than I had at that time. I have always felt that we didn't start that war. Once it was started and you had to finish it, you did what had to be done to finish it. I've always believed, along with Harry Truman, that in many ways he felt that he was saving more lives than were expended. And if in a war of that kind you had to choose between whose lives you were going to save, you would choose your own. The other thing is, if you think about it, the Japanese started that war. We didn't attack Tokyo. They attacked us. I don't feel glad about the death of anyone, whether they be a Japanese or a German or anyone else. I think that war is senseless and that death by war is probably the worst possible kind of death for anyone. We should look for every way we can to keep it from happening. But if it happens, particularly those who started it, I'm among those who feel that it was absolutely wrong for us to declare victory in Desert Storm and pull out of Iraq. I mean, that was a stupid thing to do. You exposed all those people to all that harm and left in place the leader that caused the war. I mean, what would have happened if we had done that with [Adolf] Hitler or [Hideki] Tojo?

RVH: What were your feelings about Roosevelt?

PE: Oh, we idolized him. I've read and seen all of the things about what he is alleged to have done since. But, my feeling is if that's what it took to get us into the war, it shouldn't have. That possibly if we had gotten in sooner, we could have spared a lot of pain for a lot of people.

RVH: When Roosevelt died, what was your impression?

PE: Oh, I was in Okinawa when Roosevelt died. By the way, that was a strange situation. I'm trying to remember the juxtaposition. I can't remember if it was just before or just after. But Simon Bolivar Buckner [Jr.], the general that ran that operation at Okinawa, was killed on Okinawa literally within a day or two of Roosevelt's death. That was an eerie feeling. And for me, even more so, because within the space of a week, you had Buckner, Roosevelt, Ernie Pyle, all these people died at once, almost. There was great grief. I saw men openly cry. For us in the 75th JASCO, we were particularly moved because while we were in Hawaii, before we went off...between the Makin and Kwajalein assaults, Roosevelt came to the base to Hawaii to meet with MacArthur and Nimitz. We were chosen as the honor guard. They had a special thing where his open car was pulled up for review, and we were the honor guard for that. At that time, he gave us a Presidential Unit Citation for what we had done to that date. It's one of the medals I never collected.

RVH: When Roosevelt died, Truman became president. Were there any thoughts at that point about Truman being an unknown entity?

PE: You know, it's interesting. My perspective now is interesting to me because I've had such a long history as a political writer and an observer of politics. Looking back, men in war don't think a great deal about politics. As they say, for the ordinary infantryman, his entire scope is the fifty feet or so in front of his foxhole. And back then, you really had the sense, and thinking back about it, that sergeant of ours I mentioned so much, Elmer Kaminski. When you asked him his opinion, he said, you know, I don't think too much about it. They got higher-paid folks than me making those decisions. And I'm sure all of us that survived that, since have become a lot more critical politically than we were then.

RVH: That's a good thing?

PE: Oh, yeah. I believe in an enlightened army. I believe in an enlightened populace. I think they fight better for what they believe in. But then it behooves the leadership to make sure that they only have to fight for things that are deeply believed in and at critical times. All other times, if they're adventures, we should stay the hell out of them.

RVH: Were you part of the occupation of Japan?

PE: No. I don't know, you probably are aware of the point system. Having been in as many landings as we were and having survived, those of us who were still there had tremendous numbers of points, and we were among the first to get out. The bomb was dropped, when was it? In 1945, I think. I forget the exact date. July, wasn't it? No, August, somewhere. Anyway, within a month I was out. I was out September 25th. Interestingly enough, I went into service September 24th, 1942 [when] I took the oath. I came out September 25th, 1945.

RVH: Where did you go?

PE: Came back. Well, first we went by ship from Manila to Honolulu. From Honolulu, we went on the former cruise ship [SS] Lurline, with all lights ablaze. Because the war was over by then. I still remember that. It wasn't over when we left Manila, but by the time we got to Honolulu, it was over. Then we went back to San Francisco. We were trucked to Los Angeles. No, by golly, we went into what's the port for Los Angeles? There's a naval port outside of Los Angeles. It might have been Long Beach, I'm not sure now. But anyway, we ended up in Los Angeles in a huge tent city. Each day they came and read names off. One day they came and read some off and mine was on it. We went down. They had a bunch of C-47s and pilots that were on their way out. The last job each pilot got was to ferry a C-47 back to Newark. So we got on a C-47 and flew across the country back to Newark. Took us some eighteen hours, as I recall, with landings in places

like Kansas City, Indianapolis. Then we made it into Newark and loaded us on trucks and took us back to Fort Dix. Mustered out of Fort Dix.

RVH: Well, what did you do as a civilian from that moment you mustered out? What was your first thought? What did you want to do?

PE: Went on a two-day drunk with some buddies in New York City, believe it or not. We just wanted to take a look, see.

RVH: After being overseas all that time, was there anything in particular that you wanted to do?

PE: No. It was just good to be back, to see it all. You had a feeling that was what you were fighting for. To sit back and just enjoy it all. A lot of people went out to the nearest clothing store to get civilian clothes. We didn't even bother. Separation for me was kind of hard. There was a bonding that took place, and you thought about that. You were suddenly in a different world. Military life, especially in war, changes people in a way. As Hemingway said, you had to have been there. But it was a thing which, unless you were there, no one else but you or someone else who was there knows about that. You came back, but you were different than everyone else that was back. So we just sort of wanted to get among them and see what it was we had been fighting for. Then I went home to Asbury Park, New Jersey, where they had a big party, of course. A big spread in the newspaper about my homecoming. And then I got on with the business of living.

RVH: How long was it between the time you got home and you decided to ____

PE: I got home in September of 1945. In January of 1946, I was enrolled at IU. In February, I was in classes.

RVH: Took the GI Bill?

PE: Yep, GI Bill. Went through, finished up. I had already had a year of journalism. Took music and journalism, dual major. Finished up. Came out in August of 1948. I found out it was not easy to be a working musician in New York, so I took a job at a newspaper on Long Island. A friend of mine said, you were in the Signal Corps, you're a writer, they're looking for people at Fort Monmouth. And I became a civilian public information officer attached to the Signal School in 1950 at Fort Monmouth and I stayed for four years. I was there during the McCarthy Army fiasco.

RVH: What did you think about that?

PE: In some ways, that bothered me more than the war did.

RVH: Really?

PE: You had pride during the war. I sat in on a lot of strategy sessions, which I said, what are we going to do now? Let's man the guns. Let's go to work on this SOB. No, no, no. We were told we had to cooperate in every way. You felt like you were helping him ferret out all these Reds, but there weren't any, not really. They never brought anybody to trial or anything like that. They ruined a lot of lives, and he went there with Roy Cohn and held a lot of public meetings in high schools around Fort Monmouth. Everything but the Sieg Heil afterwards. I was really upset about it. And finally, I went to the CO of the unit. I was with the Reserve Officers Training School. That was my public information job. And I said, I can't handle this, watching all this happen. I just can't be a part of it. He said, our hands are tied. There's nothing we can do. So, I tendered my letter of resignation. My parents were beside themselves. They thought if I resigned at that time, it would look like perhaps I had been one of those ferreted out. I got a letter of commendation when I went out.

RVH: Any repercussions?

PE: None, ever. I had done too much good work.

RVH: What do you think of Eisenhower's handling of the project?

PE: My view... There's an old joke. I liked Eisenhower. I really did. I thought he was a much better general than MacArthur. MacArthur was a brilliant man, but he was the wrong kind of a man to be a general because he was too political. Generals aren't supposed to be that political. They gotta be military. They're put there to get the job done. I am going to tell an old joke. "Two political operatives from the Republican Party met at the convention after Ike stepped down, and they were nominating the new candidate. One turned to the other and said, wasn't this just a horrendous administration? And the other one said, yes, and isn't it glad we Republicans weren't part of it?" [laughs] I liked Dick, and I thought he was absolutely right about the military defense establishment that we needed to watch out for.

RVH: Have you read Brokaw's book?

PE: Parts of it. I haven't read all of it.

RVH: What's your opinion of the title?

PE: *The Greatest Generation*? I don't know if it was the greatest generation or not, having been a part of it. I think about it. I've done a lot of reading about the Civil War. I wonder if they weren't the greatest generation or if they didn't think of themselves as, and rightly so when you think about it. I've done a lot of reading about the Revolutionary

War. When you think of what those people went up against to establish an idea which became a nation, I wonder if they weren't the greatest generation. So I think it may be a bit presumptuous. Yes, I think the world was on the brink of near extinction, at least civilization as we knew it. In many ways, they were a great generation, and I was proud to be part of that. But I'm not so sure I would say we were the greatest. I don't know.

RVH: Do you have any general feelings about your service?

PE: Looking back, one of the things that I've come to believe is that wars, maybe Napoleon was right, that the victor is the one that makes the least mistakes. War is really a series of mistakes. That's how you get into them. Looking back on some of the operations I went through, it's amazing that we got through them and that we won them. Which more and more brings me back to the fact that so much of war depends on the ordinary soldier, sailor, Marine, airman. Yes, you need brilliant people to lead them, but God, when I think of some of the things that happened because ordinary people just did the impossible, the near impossible. That's really what I think about war and why we need to do everything we can to keep from getting into them. But one of the things I have to say is, I have the greatest respect for the people who give their lives to military service in this democracy. We couldn't maintain a democracy without it. I know there are people who believe we could do without the military. No, you couldn't. You need to always be there for whatever the needs of that democracy are with the military, just as the ordinary citizen has to be there. But I do believe that because of our history as a participatory democracy and the whole idea of the citizen army, citizen soldier, that we don't have enough respect for the people who fill those roles. Those in the professional military, I understand they have an elitist feeling about what they do, but I still believe that we need to maintain a proper respect for the people who drop everything and come when their country calls.

RVH: Any final thoughts?

PE: No, I was proud to do it, and I'd probably do it again. [laughs]