VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations

Interview with

Owen Smith

Conducted by Ms. Deb Barrett

October 5, 2007

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This interview is being conducted on October 5, 2007, with Mr. Owen Smith at the Indian Prairie Library in Darien, Illinois. My name is Deb Barrett. Mr. Smith was born on April 22, 1925, in Chicago, Illinois. He is a retired director of sales and national accounts with a major trucking company, and he learned of the Veterans History Project through Joe Popowitch, Director in charge of this project at the library. Joe had read about him in a local newspaper article. Mr. Smith has kindly consented to be interviewed for this project. Here is his story.

Owen, where were you living when you went to the service? What was your life like just before you went in?

Well, I went into the service right out of St. George High School in Evanston, Illinois. We lived in the north Edgewater and Rogers Park area all of my life. My parish was St. Ita's Church. It's still there right at Catalpa and Broadway – 5500 North Broadway, right near the Edgewater Beach Hotel. When I graduated from St. Ita's in 1940, both my friends – my buddies – we all went to St. George High School because they had a good athletic program. Loyola was mostly for if you were a brain and that, and they didn't have too good of sports teams. We were into sports. We had a basketball team named the Olympics. We started in sixth grade in grammar school playing basketball around the neighborhood, and won a lot of trophies. We had a very dedicated man named Bill Maloney who coached us. When we got to St. George High School we had two teams. If you were 5' 8" or under, you were called a "junior." But if you were 5' 8" or over, you were called a "senior" player. So it was kind of like heavy weights and light weights. So I was just 5' 8" even. I graduated from high school early, because I turned 18 and I wanted to go down and enlist in the Marine Corps or whatever. So I got down to the center to enlist, and I was standing in the Navy lane. The reason I stood in the Navy lane was that my brother was already in the Navy – my brother, Raymond. He was on a carrier in the Pacific at the time. And my Dad, who was in World War I, he was in the Navy on the USS Tenadores, a ship that was sunk in World War I. So he was pro-Navy, and my brother was in the Navy. I said, I don't know about the Navy. The only thing I wanted to do in the Navy was to go into what we called "pig boat" service – submarine service. You see a lot of action, do a lot of things. I was small. I could slip into a bunk. But when I got down to the induction center, I was standing in the Navy line. The Army line was long, and the Navy one was a bigger one. About one or two guys over, a really handsome Marine sergeant with a lot of medals motioned me out of line. I asked him, "What do you want?" He said, "You don't want to go in the Army. You don't want to go in the Navy. If you want to see action, you join the Marine Corps." So he signed me up and I joined the Marines in 1943.

So, what prompted you to enlist, first of all?

Well, it was either being drafted or you enlisted. If you were drafted you had to go where they sent you. I had the draft card, and he signed me up right away. And that was in the

spring of 1943. About a month later I shipped out to the Marine Corps depot center in San Diego, California.

So your training was in …

San Diego, California.

It was not at Paris Island.

No. East coast Marines were at Paris Island; west coast – Chicago and beyond – were at the Marine Depot in San Diego, California. So, I was shipped out there and we had a thirteen week boot camp where they taught you everything.

Now, when you go to Marine Corps boot camp, they take you there in the middle of the night, right?

Right. We got off the train and there were buses waiting. What we call our DI Sergeant – drill instructor sergeant – he says, "Hurry up you (indistinct) he used that word. And we got in the buses and they took us to our barracks area and we all checked in. That was about 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning. And they let us sleep for about three hours.

What was it like when you got there and this sergeant started to …

I said, well, we're really in for it now. One guy behind me said, "Oh, is that right?" I said I didn't know. We had boot camp for thirteen weeks. Our drill sergeant was Sergeant McKinney. He was the best one to train us because we learned how to do everything before we could graduate from boot camp. And when you graduated from boot camp you made PFC right away, which I did. But he taught me rifle. He taught me bayonet instruction. He gave me physical therapy. He taught bayonet and arm-to-arm fighting. You had to qualify on the rifle range. Two things in the Marine Corps you had to do in boot camp: you had to learn how to shoot a rifle accurately so you could kill people, and you had to learn how to swim. Fortunately, with my training up north and going down to the beach by the Edgewater Beach Hotel – we used to play softball, jump in the lake, and I taught myself how to swim. And besides that, my grandparents had a cottage in Stevens Hill, Michigan, which we used to go over there in the summer when we were young. So I learned how to swim there – my Dad helped me. I knew how to swim. But you had to learn to be at least a marksman, fire a gun, and you had to learn how to swim.

Is that the first time you picked up a rifle? Had you shot before?

I did it once on my uncle's farm up in Canada.

You had done some hunting?

Yes. So I qualified on the rifle range. I qualified on the bayonet. I qualified in swimming, naturally, and gymnastics or exercises. And then I had to qualify on the M30 carbine – the M1 was a long, heavy rifle so it was a clip of eight. The carbine had a clip underneath of fifteen. But since we were in communications we couldn't carry a heavy rifle, we had to carry the lighter one. But it had fifteen rounds in it, which was good enough to kill a lot of Japs.

Let's talk about what life was like in the camp. What was your barracks like?

The barracks was really clean. You kept it neat. You kept yourself neat. You shaved every morning. You brushed your teeth. You went out and did calisthenics first thing – 0500 in the morning they got you out. The first thing you did was the push up, the jumping jacks, push ups and everything. Then you went in, showered and shaved and got ready for chow. Chow was usually at 6:30 in the morning, the bugle would blow, everybody would get their trays and go in the chow lines.

What did you typically have for breakfast?

Sometimes we had eggs, and they were big on Spam (both chuckle). Lots of Spam; lots of Spam. But the chow was good – the food wasn't bad in boot camp at all. When we got to Camp Pendleton it was much different. But they gave you enough to eat. And they gave you what we called "bug juice," which looked like a soft drink but it had saltpeter in it. The saltpeter was so the guys could get excited (both chuckle). It was like Kool-Aid. They'd say, drink that stuff. I finally found out what it was for! But the food at boot camp wasn't bad at all. Evening chow was about I'd say, right before 1800 – 1750; 5:30, 6:00 in the afternoon. Then you went back to the barracks and could relax. They might call you out for one more inspection. Another thing in the Marine Corps was they could call an inspection at any time of the day or night, morning or whenever – and they did. And your bed had to be tight – you had to bounce a quarter off those blankets. And if you didn't make it right, it was fall out and give me 30. Plus, you had to keep your foot locker neat. Your socks, your shaving gear, everything – it couldn't be thrown in there. Your clothes had to be hung up neatly – your uniform, your shirts, everything. And if you failed inspection, you had to go out on the drill grounds doing 3 or 4 laps. Or you had to go out and pick up cigarettes – people who smoked had butts. They'd tell you to go around and get 50 or 60 cigarettes. Fortunately in boot camp I was a very neat guy. I took a shower, I had a light beard so I could sneak in shaving one day and the next day I was fine. But Sergeant McKinney and his two DI helpers were very good to us if you obeyed. If you didn't obey you were in trouble.

Did you ever get KP or get in trouble?

No. Never got KP. Never got in trouble. Because I obeyed. I figured, if you didn't, you'd get like these other guys. And these poor non-swimmers, right after they ate at say 1750, 1800 at night – 6:00 – they'd say, swimmers fall out. So we had about ten guys in our platoon who couldn't swim. And they had to go out and learn how to swim before they could graduate from boot camp. And we had towers at the pools there – like

jumping off a boat; you had to have your pack on and jump off the boat and hang on. You could take your helmet off and throw it back. But the only thing is, we had to jump with [full packs] so you wouldn't hit the boat down below or knock yourself out on the ground. So we kept jumping off that top pier all the time and I could swim up and down three or four laps no problem. But I felt sorry for all these guys. There was one guy who was in our tent. His name was Terry Duward. He lived right out of St. Louis. And the poor guy, he had to stay behind. He couldn't graduate until he learned how to swim. He finally learned how to swim. The DI kept pushing his head down, "Swim, swim swim!"

What sort of classes did you have besides the physical training?

We had to go through the gas chambers.

What was that like?

First of all, you went in and they gave you tear gas without a mask.

So you knew what it was like.

Yes. You'd breath that tear gas and (coughs), and you'd come out. Then they gave us gas masks and they had the powerful stuff, but you just had to walk through that. When you got out to the rifle range – that was at Camp Perry, I believe – you crawled under barbed wire with machine guns shooting over your head. They weren't shooting at you, so they wouldn't hit you, but you had to know what the battle sounds like. You had to crawl with your rifle and your helmet, and your knife and bayonet and everything on there – a couple of times a day to do that so you'd get used to the gunfire.

Did anyone ever get hurt?

Not to my knowledge, no. Of course, the machine guns were mounted pretty high. If you stood up you were stupid! But they had the barbed wire. You had to crawl underneath the barbed wire with your rifle and your gear – your pack.

What was all the gear that you carried with you, and what was in your pack?

Oh, man! We had our canteen on our pack. We had some rations, we had our T-bar [USMC K-Bar] knife, we had our bayonet, we had our kit with penicillin in it – our first aid kit --, we had bandages and we had to carry K-rations at the time.

Cans?

No. K-rations were in the box. C-rations were in the cans. C-rations were good because you could get hot dogs and beans. K-rations were just dry. In K-rations they had a little pack of four cigarettes. I was a non-smoker, so I used to give my cigarettes to guys that smoked. But, besides your bayonet, rifle and communications – see, we had to carry

reels of wire for the handheld radio – that was enough to carry. There were clothes in your pack, soap – whatever you'd need.

Do you know how heavy your pack was?

They say the average pack was 45 to 50 pounds. We used to take long marches with them on our back to get us in shape.

Strengthening exercises.

Yes, on your legs.

So you had the physical training, you had getting familiar with the battle sounds and the fields and what you might go through. Did you have any academic classes?

Yes, they taught us regular general questions. They taught us some math. They taught us about the Marine Corps history, how it was founded in 1776 in Tun's Tavern in Philadelphia, and that's how it became the Marine Corps. That's what we celebrate every November 10. As a matter of fact, there's a big dinner-dance of the Naperville Marines that I can't make this year because my wife is ill. They have it every year at the Holiday Inn in Naperville. We always used to celebrate November 10 in the Marine Corps. And the reason they got the name "leathernecks" is that when the first Marines started fighting they put a leather collar on them because they were fighting with swords and if you tried to chop off a guy's head, with the leather collar you couldn't put a dent in it. And that's how they got the name "leathernecks." In World War I, I think it was at Chateau Thierry, the Marines captured the German outpost and killed a lot of Germans, and they gave them the name "devil dogs." They fought like "devil dogs:" – they kept fighting, they never dropped and kept coming – and they gave them the name "devil dogs." And there's still a group of people called "devil dogs" in the Marine Corps, that keep the name like that.

Okay. So you had your basic training in San Diego for thirteen weeks, and from there you went to …

We went out to the rifle range with the guns, fired our carbines and everything like that. Another thing they did in the Marine Corps – every day, once a day at least – they'd inspect your rifles. And there better not be any dust in those rifles, nothing wrong with the sights or anything. You kept that rifle clean, and if you didn't you slept with it – you had to sleep with your rifle until you learned how to take care of it. Of course, I never adapted to machinery or anything, but I learned how to put the M1 together, and the carbine was really easy to put together. That was one thing they insisted in the Marine Corps (sounds like Mr. Smith is hitting the table for emphasis): keep your weapon clean, and keep your weapon dry. If you dropped dead, and you had a Thompson sub-machine gun – I learned how to shoot a Thompson machine gun – if you dropped dead and you had a .45, I'd take your .45, so I had something to fire. So you're always armed. The Marine Corps is never without arms. If you lost your rifle, it blew up or something. But

they always train you to pick up another weapon. I fired a BAR once, and that was just to see how it felt – that was a big gun.

Browning Automatic Rifle

Yes. Very good! You know more than I do!
Another thing they did in the Marine Corps was close-order drill, where you learn how to march, oblique march, forward, backwards and everything. The first couple of weeks people were getting tangle-footed and everything like that. And they'd yell at us – "Terry, fall out, left, right, left, right. Keep in cadence!" But after two weeks you'd get really good. Close-ordered drill they called it; oblique marches. So we got that down pat. And everything else went fine. You just did what you were told. They taught you things and you learned things. You learned how to fight, how to protect yourself. They did have these bungee things. We used to fight with the bayonet with the scabbard on it and jab each other, parry where you'd knock the rifle out of another person's hands. So that was very interesting – me, being a city boy, going through this for thirteen weeks. But I got through it in good shape, and, like I said, I was promoted to PFC right out of boot camp. Then I went to communications school.

While you were in boot camp, did you have free time?

Yes, they gave us free time.

What did you do in your free time?

We used to call it the "slop shoot." That's where they sold beer and Coke and stuff like that. But, being 18, we couldn't get served. But the older guys could go down and get a pitcher of beer for 20¢ and cups. We'd go down and get Cokes. A matter of fact, they had a Coke machine right by the barracks, if we had the money to buy Cokes. But they didn't want you to eat pogie bait candy. "No, pogie bait. By God, if I catch you with any candy in your locker …!" No brownies or anything. See, Mom used to send stuff, and the cookies we could eat right away because everybody wanted stuff from home. But I didn't want to leave them in my locker because I figured that was sweets and you weren't supposed to eat sweets. And that's another thing – they gave you a great, great physical – eyes, ears, teeth, everything like that. They made sure you were fit. Because you had to be the fittest of the fit to join the Marine Corps. They didn't want anybody who had ear problems, eye problems, teeth problems, feet problems, knee problems, aches or pains or anything like that. And they'd ask you what surgeries you had. The only surgery I had was when I was young I had my tonsils and adenoids out when I was six years old – matter of fact, I damn near died. I went to a hospital called Henrotin Hospital on North Clark Street in Chicago. And my mother and father took me there. And this doctor operated to take my tonsils and adenoids out. And they put me under, and lo and behold I didn't come out of the ether for three days. When I woke up in bed, my mother and father were standing there and they were both crying because they didn't think I was going to make it. And they always thought that would give me heart problems. And I couldn't understand why they were crying. I said, "Why are you crying." They said,

"You realize you've been laying in that bed for three days and we've been standing here watching you, watching you and watching you and praying." I said the good Lord was with me – so good Catholic prayer.

Strong enough for the Marine Corps.

Strong enough for the Marine Corps. I shouldn't say this, but I also had a congenital heart problem at the time – about a year later. And they sent me to this hospital on the south side – LaRabida. And I was there – that's why I skipped second grade – they kept me in that hospital for six months. But when I came out my heart was fit. I played softball. I played basketball. I played touch football.

So you were very active.

Yes, I was active. All through grammar school we'd be playing softball, basketball – all through high school. And I had no problem with the heart. As a matter of fact when I went down for my physical they said everything was in good shape. So I never worried about my heart, and I'm 82 years old today.

So when you were in the Marines and they didn't want you to have sweets – they must have known you got sweets from home.

Well, I know. But they would overlook some things. They didn't want you to have what they called candy bars.

Bakery was different than candy.

Yes, bakery was all right – the cookies and brownies. They wouldn't last long because everybody would crowd around and you'd pass them out. But you couldn't buy candy – Baby Ruth's, Butterfingers, or stuff like that. And you shouldn't be caught with pogie bait because they'd take it and throw it in the toilet. "Don't eat pogie bait! Drink less Cokes!" Because there was a lot of sugar. We didn't know that at that time – it was 1943 and I was 18 years old. But we got through boot camp. The training was excellent. If you graduated from boot camp, you felt that you were qualified to do anything. You could jump off a battleship, you could jump into the ocean and swim – you could turn your pack around and float on it, take all the stuff out. It was excellent training. I believe that thirteen weeks in the Marine Corps boot camp was the best training anybody in the armed forces could get – the Army, the Navy, except the Air Corps paratroopers. We went for thirteen weeks – I think the Army was seven or eight weeks' basic training. You had to qualify in everything or you didn't graduate. And once you graduated, boy, you felt good.

So you got out of your basic training, …

When you got out of basic training, you put on your dress greens and everything, you had your stripes on your arm, and paraded between the generals on the parade ground. And

they had the *Stars and Stripes Forever*, the John Phillip Sousa's *American Eagle March.* And when you parade beyond that stand where the generals and officers were and gave them the right hand salute and they saluted back, that was the greatest feeling in the world. Now you're a Marine! You made it.

Were your parents able to watch you?

No. My mother and dad lived in Chicago – you probably don't remember this, but in World War II …Travel was difficult—trains only.

There was rationing.

Well, not rationing, but you couldn't get trains out there and there were hardly any flights at that time from Chicago to California. But they finally got out on the train when my brother was in San Diego and I was in communications school. And they stayed out there – that's when that picture in LA was taken at my Uncle Jack's house – Jack Sullivan. He lived in LA. And they came out for a week just before I shipped out, and my brother, Ray, was going out on the USS Coral Sea. And that was the last time he saw my mother and father.

So you left basic training. You went on for communications training?

Communications training right at the San Diego base.

And how did you get selected for that?

Well, how they picked you – whether you were smart enough or what. Out of the platoon I think we had six guys qualify for communications. The others were riflemen, or put in the artillery, or something like that.

And you said it was radio and telephone, both. You had to qualify separately for both. What was the difference between the qualifications?

Well, telephone, you had to climb poles, put up wire – string wire – connect them to the phone. The phone was in a leather case and you put the wires in the phone and you had a handle to crank it, and you picked it up and talked. And with the telephone we had dah, dah, dit, dit, dah, dah, dah. But that wasn't that important, because by the time we got overseas they had talking units.

Like walky-talkies. So how long was your communications school?

That was ten weeks.

That was almost as long as your basic!

Yes. But we stayed right in San Diego, which was good – you could get liberty on weekends and everything like that. So I could go into San Diego – the Marine Corps bus would take you in – go to a movie, get a milk shake, buy a hamburger; get all the good stuff! Then, when my mother and father came out there, my brother – the captain in charge of the communications school said, "Owen, take a couple of extra days to be with your parents. Because after this you're going up to Camp Pendleton to join the Fifth Marine Division. You'll train there and from there on it's overseas." So he gave me a couple of extra days to be with my mother and father and my brother, Ray. My brother shipped out before I did.

He was in the Marines also?

He was in the Navy. He was on the USS Coral Sea – a Navy aircraft carrier.

How did the people react when they'd see you in uniform, or see you out on liberty?

What they used to say was, "Don't urinate on their lawns." Dogs were all right, but soldiers, sailors and Marines, stay off our lawns – don't urinate. So they thought more of their dogs than they did of the armed services. But, you know some guys would drink beer and go out and all of a sudden they'd need to make a "stop" and used whatever was handy. (Both chuckle) I never drank. I didn't drink until I got to Japan.

So you spent some time with your parents …

Yeah, I spent about a week there.

And you knew you were shipping out, and they knew you were shipping out.

Well, we were shipping out to Camp Pendleton. But some nights I had to be back to base by 10:00. I'd take the bus back and walk in, and they'd check my pass and I'd say, "Okay, I'm going to go to my parents." But when you've got four weeks to go at 72 – that's from Friday night, Saturday night and be back Sunday night – that was three days. You had to be back by reveille on Monday – so by 5:00 am on Monday. Otherwise you were marked AWOL.

Okay. So you went to Camp Pendleton.

Yes. After I graduated from communications school, a bunch of us went up to Camp Pendleton in Oceanside, California. We were taken by – not "taken" – I mean the 13th Marines were the original. We were requested to join, which we joined, and we trained at Camp Pendleton for a long time.

And what kind of training did you have at Camp Pendleton?

Well, the 13th Marines was an artillery outfit – we had the 105 artillery guns. And we trained with them. They were the ones that stayed behind, but if you were on the front

lines you'd say "286, 411." I'd call back – I was a forward observer – I'd call back to the guns, to the commander back there, "Grids 426, 421, red group." That was our code call -- purple, and then they would get the guns and fire when ready. So they'd fire a shot and we'd start to hear it. And if the shot fell here, I'd say, "Up 500, right 50, left 100," and they'd zero in. And then when they got in there I'd say, "Fire for effect," because they were on the target, and they'd keep pumping it with the 105 shells.

So you were training. You were going to be on the front lines, and the guns were going to be way back (both chuckle).

Way back! We had three infantry divisions in the Fifth Marine Division – 26, 27 and 28. I served with all of them as a forward observer – (indistinct) down the hill, airfield one was terrible because you couldn't defend it at times. Once we captured Suribachi everyone thought the war was over. That was a mistake, a mistake.

So you were in Camp Pendleton, you got the training for this – how long was that training?

I can't recall. I'd say it was at least four or five months, because then we went out to the Mojave Desert where it was really hot. And we trained out there for a month and a half or two months. We learned how to zero in there. I don't know, in the artillery these 105's, they had gun tools that was six or seven. We used to put out aiming stakes and zero in their sights. And then, if they ever got overrun, they could sight through the barrel of the gun. So if the Japs were charging and you didn't have any choice you'd sight through the gun – put the shell inside and fire it that way. So we were down to all that stuff. I mean, we knew how to … I never fired the 105 because I was in communications and calling back the grids where to fire.

But you still had your rifle with you.

Oh, I had my rifle with me! (both chuckle) I had an M1, but when we graduated from communications school in San Diego we were issued carbines. They were a smaller rifle to carry with the communications gear.

So when you finished this training, is that when you went overseas?

When we finished the training we went up to Camp Pendleton. We stayed there for more training – more close order drill and all that. I'd say five or six months. And then we got ordered to go to Hawaii. So we went down to San Pedro, got on transports – the Fifth Marine Division – all of us got on transports and left for Hilo, Hawaii – beautiful Hawaii. But we were up in the mountain range near Mauna Loa where it was all volcanic ash and all that stuff.

This was part of preparation?

Advance training – right. Oh, besides that, in California we were trained on landing craft – the kinds of landings. They would take us out and let us out. They'd teach us how to carry our rifles and all that, getting used to jumping into water, so you could make it up to the beach. We had landing craft training for a long time so that people weren't afraid of getting off the ramp.

That's why you needed to know how to swim!

If you didn't know how to swim you were in trouble, baby! Thank God for good old Lake Michigan! I didn't tell you about that. When we got through playing 16" softball when we were in high school – we had a real good team, we won the trophy twice at Pierce playground up north on Bryn Mawr Avenue. We'd go down to the lake, and the Edgewater Beach was there where the boats tied – Guy Lombardo would play and they'd come by to hear the music, the boats would pull up to the pier and the ladies would come out in their evening gowns and men had the white tuxes, the dress jackets. We'd swim around the fence and lay on the beach and listen to the music and watch the boats land. It was just paradise. You could hear the music, you were cool from playing softball, you'd see the beautiful ladies with the flowers, and Horace Heidt or Guy Lombardo would play and it was just paradise. So we'd lay in the sand for about an hour or two and swim back and go home. That was one of my most favorite things to do – finish a ball game, win a ball game – we finally got a couple of trophies after playing in town -- but that was the highlight. After you played softball – there were no showers or anything – so we just went down to Lake Michigan and Bryn Mawr, swam around the fence and got out right on the grounds of Edgewater Beach Hotel.

So you were set for the swimming you were going to have to do in the Marines.

Yeah, yeah. They were playing in the Marine dining room. As a matter of fact, when I was overseas, on the shortwave radio we could hear, "We're playing from the beautiful Marine dining room on the north side of Chicago at the Edgewater Beach Hotel. Now here's Horace Heidt and his wonderful band." I could have been there, right there in the sand! Why wasn't I a 4-F! (both chuckle)

So you got to Hawaii and you all knew this was training – did you all know where you were heading after this?

No. They never told us. Those orders were sealed. When we trained in Hawaii we got weekend liberty – the nearest town that was anything was Hilo. We were stationed there. As a matter of fact, when we landed in Hawaii we got on an open train where they used to put sugar cane on. But somebody broke out with chicken pox, we never got the straight story – but we were quarantined on the beach for two weeks before they would let us go in the camp.

On the beach – so you were living in tents?

Yes, in tents on the beach. And we had to carry our big duffle bags, rifles and everything on that walk. But I don't know whether it was diphtheria, chicken pox or what, but somebody broke out with it and they quarantined the whole group of us. Which was great because we couldn't do anything but eat and swim! (both chuckle)

Something you enjoyed!

Yeah. But you couldn't do something – you couldn't fire your rifle because there was nothing to shoot at. So we did close order drill and taught the guys, and get briefed on being on an LST, an APA (assault personnel ship). So once we got into camp it was fine. It was called Camp Tarawa – the Marines took Tarawa. The second Marine division trained there, and the fifth Marines. We trained there to go overseas. I mean, once we got to Hawaii there was more training on the volcanic ash. We trained at night, we trained in the day.

What did you know about what your mission was going to be?

Well, we knew we were going into combat. That's for sure. It was just a matter of time. But we didn't know where, because at that time – I think it was July – we thought we'd go to Saipan, New Guinea or Guam. But the second Marine division was out there, and I think the first Marine division. So we knew we could go in for mop-up unless we weren't needed. So our training in Hawaii was a good six or seven months and we got the orders to move out. And we all got in our bunks, packed our gear, our pictures and whatever else we wanted, some of our letters from home which we really enjoyed, and go down to Hilo.

So you were able to keep in contact with your family while you were there.

Yes. Once in a while you got a chance to call long distance, or they'd call you, and they'd come to your tent and say you got a call from Chicago. But not often because the lines were always tied up. But I did get a chance to say good-bye to them before I shipped out to Hawaii. But once you got to Hawaii your letters were censored. So you couldn't tell them where you were or what you were doing that much. They would censor your letter and black it out or cut it out. I'd always write my girlfriend – I had a girlfriend back home, too; her name was Alice – and just to keep in touch. But once we got to Hilo we couldn't write back and say we were in Hilo or anything like that. It was just taboo. And as a matter of fact if the letters were censored they'd cut that part out. So I think we were in Hilo – we got there in the middle of 1944 I would say – we probably were there about five or six months practicing artillery fire, practicing boat landing. We went over to the island of Maui and practice boat landing there, coming in on the landing craft vehicles, LCV, and the ramp would go down and you'd come up. We had to take the guns out, too, and we had to hook them up to a 6 X 6 truck to pull that heavy piece of artillery. So they were on different LCTs
. But one of the training missions over in Maui, coming back, I don't know what happened. But the LST – the landing craft, I mean – started sinking. So we lost a gun and all the equipment. But we saved the eight Marines on the landing craft. One guy

jumped in and saved a guy and he got the Bronze Star for that. So we were very happy. Then, when we were on the ships off of Hilo – we had a Naval escort there – and we used to go up to the bridge. And we had flags where we could signal the guy on the other ship – A, B, C, like that. And we were sending messages back and forth like that. And that was a lot of fun. That was one thing in communications – you knew how to do signal flags.

The semaphore?

Right. So, now, we're in Hawaii. More training. More landing craft training. More artillery training. More rifle training. Just keep training, training, training. Every day.

Honing those skills.

Right. And like I said, weekends they'd take us – once in a while I'd drive a jeep with a big radio in the back and an officer would sit in with me during training. But once in a while I'd get to drive it down to Hilo or some place like that to gets Cokes or candy bars. So we could go to Hilo and spend Saturday night and Sunday and then come back. What I liked about Hilo – you could get ham and eggs from the Hawaiians; ham, Spam, two eggs, hash brown potatoes, pancakes, juice and coffee for 90¢ (both chuckle). And that would fill you up for all day. So you could walk around town and buy things, hula skirts and shirts and stuff like that.

And send them back home?

Send them back home. That's right.

You could send that stuff back home even though they weren't supposed to know you were in Hawaii?

Well, at that time I don't think we sent that much home. If we were in Hawaii they knew we were going into combat. But, see, our letters – I don't know how they postmarked our letters. Maybe they didn't postmark our letters and packages. They just put FPO, San Francisco – it's a big post office, so you didn't know where it was at; it could be anywhere.

So when did you find out where you were going?

Well, after our training was completed – and we really drilled hard on the artillery and the rapid fire, because we didn't want anything like friendly fire – where shells fell short and you hit your own men to boot. You'd rather be over than under, to the right a little bit or to the left a little bit, rather than being short and landing on your own people in the foxhole. So that was one thing we emphasized back there. We'd give them the right coordinates and could not botch up the coordinates, so they had to repeat the coordinates to us to make sure they got the right ones. So they'd say, "Roger and out. Wilco. We'll comply." So we got through that real good. And like I said, we must have spent I'd say

about six months – time went by pretty fast then at Hilo for cokes and candy and things like that -- so we got the orders to move out one day – pack up your gear. And in the meantime …

Did they tell you where?

Oh, no! We didn't know we were going to Iwo Jima until we were aboard ship and seven days out, and the orders came. The destroyer came out and sent the mail bag over, and the officers and sergeants went down to the conference room.

So you were given orders …

Once we got on the ships at Hilo – we had to box up all our equipment, paint the boxes green and stencil it with what it was, communications and whatever your outfit was. Of course the infantry had mortars and all the stuff they could carry aboard – all our stuff was packed up in boxes and painted green. So they loaded all that on our ship. And once we left Hilo we were on our own. We were on an APA I don't know how long. And all they did was exercise us on the deck and eat chow and lay down and sack out because there was nothing else to do.

What did people do for recreation when they were there?

Well, I mean, you walked around the ship, mingled with the sailors, they played music occasionally. You could go down – the Ward Room was for officers, and the underclassmen couldn't go in there – but we'd call the wards or servers or whatever they were called, and they'd bring coffee out and give you coffee or whatever you wanted. But the Navy treated us real well. If it wasn't for the Navy, the Marine Corps could never get on the beach and never get off the beach. And if it wasn't for the Naval flyers flying Wildcats and F4U's, a lot more would have gotten killed on Iwo Jima, believe me.

So this was a Navy ship.

Yes. I think APA 621. I forgot the name of it. But going back, we were about six days out, a destroyer came alongside – we were in a large battle group, a large task force; carriers, destroyers; you look around and all you could see was ships, and we were kind of in the middle with the troops. So a destroyer came alongside one day, and they sent over the pouch – what they called a breeches buoy, where they shoot it over and send the pouch over. And they got the pouch and one guy says, "The officer's not here, boys." I said, "You've got to go down to the Ward Room and read them." So they went down – everybody was piped aboard to go down to the Ward Room with the officers and sergeants; you had to be a gunny-sergeant or above. And they took about five or six hours. And they got pictures of it. And the next morning they called us out right after chow in the morning and showed us the picture of Iwo Jima and said there's our objective. It looks like a pork chop – because Suribachi was down here and airfields up here. He said, "We've been bombing this island – Air Force, Navy flyers, everything – for ninety straight days. But I'll tell you something. It's all caves and they're dug in.

They're still there, even though we bomb it daily. Everyday we drop bombs, bombs, bombs from the Air Force, the Navy – everybody. It was called the Air Corps at the time." Believe me, they thought everything was going to be secure. So we landed at Iwo.

Before we get to Iwo Jima, I was just curious about the other men on the ship with you. You got these orders, you were shown this thing – what was the mood of the people; how were people reacting?

After chow we'd sit around – because we were on a ship, we could run around the ship and get exercise so we didn't get stagnant. We slept down below in two-tiered bunks. They'd give you water. You'd go down to the mess hall – the black sailors were great; they got to like me for some reason, that's why they looked so young (both chuckle).

Well you were young! You were how old?

I was still 18. I turned 19 on Iwo Jima.

But did the Marines talk to each other after you got these orders? What was the talk after you got these orders?

They put up the map and everybody sat down to listen. This is the first Japan held island that we would take in World War II. Everything has been Saipan, Tinian, Guadalcanal, Tarawa. These were our islands. They never invaded the Hawaiian Islands, thank God. But this was the closest to Japan – 700 miles away. This was their homeland. You're going to go in and fight these guys, and they're going to fight to the death (Mr. Smith pounds the table to emphasize these words). "Be prepared: knife, gun, sword, .45, M1, BAR, mortars – whatever you can do. But we've got to knock them out." And they said there were 22,000 Japs, but most of them were dug in caves.

So what did you think when they told you this? What were you feeling?

Well, everybody said, "If they've been bombing it for ninety days they must have killed a lot of people. How bad could it be." And when we got to Iwo and saw Mount Suribachi sticking up and everything going down there. But they also explained, the officers at the time – I'm trying to think of the staff: Captain McCullough – "Here's where we're going to land – Red Beach – and we're going to go in 0830, 0900 or something like that." But he said the beach is like coffee grounds – it's real soft and you can't dig in too far because it just falls back in on itself.

It's volcanic.

Right. Volcanic ash. But he said, "Good Lord willing, we should secure the beach on the first day at the latest." Well, we secured the beach, I would say, in the first seven or eight hours. One company of the fifth Marine division – I think it was Foxtrot – cut off

the island; cut off Suribachi from the other caves down that way. So we fought at the base of Suribachi for three days.

So when you got to Iwo Jima, you got off in the water …

Yeah. We got off in the water, got ashore and moved inland. Because if you were laying on the beach – they had sniper fire, they had mortar fire, they could kill a lot of people. Everyone had to get off the beach. I have pictures at home that I was going to bring you, but they're too gruesome. None of our guys got killed at that time. The infantry – the guys in the 26th, 27th and 28th Marines were the ones who really got battered. But then, as you moved in – and, like I say, I think it was the first day or the second day; I think it was the 26th or 27th Marines – cut across the island and got to the other side of the island. Suribachi was cut off and this end was cut off. And we were sitting down at the base of Suribachi shooting 105's at them all the time.

So they were dug in in all these caves?

That's right. That's what their defense was.

From what I've read, there was actually like an underground trails and tunnels …

Yes. They could go from tunnel to tunnel, from one cave to another. You could take a flame thrower and think everybody was dead, and they're gone into the cave about 60 or 70 yards away. And the second night we were on there – and like I said we called in fire on Suribachi for three days, so it must have been the third night. Once Suribachi was captured (tape turns over)

The tape ended and we were talking about going on Iwo Jima. You said the Marines were able to get across after several days and cut the island in half. So Mount Suribachi was separated from the rest of the island.

Right. That's where they had the lookouts on top and could tell everybody where we were. They were really entrenched on Suribachi. And I think the third day, and I was at the bottom on the third day, firing the 105 gunfire for these guys and getting pretty close. We were trying to fire on the other side so they'd land on the other side. But I could call the Naval gunfire occasionally and they would come in. God bless the Naval flyers. The torpedo bombers would come in, and the Wildcats would come in, and the Marine pilots – F4U's – they flew the gull planes. And they would be drop bombing that side for us. They'd drop four bombs in a row – boom, boom, boom; you could hear them hit. So they were trying to get the other side because we could get the front from this side. So it really worked out well. But like I said, the flag raising itself was dramatic. But the first flag raising – I hate to say this, but some officer in one of the outfits said the flag was too small; you couldn't see it up on the other end of the island on the boats.

And you wanted the Japanese to see it clearly.

Right. You wanted the Japanese to see that the Americans owned this island now. Not the Japanese. So he tore the flag down. And all the ships are out there and could see this. So they sent out a landing craft to a destroyer, and they got one of the big Naval flags – you know, bigger than that. I think that's when they got that hot pipe from the volcano ash and tied it to that – the second group. The first group finally got credit for it – that they raised the flag first, but it wasn't big enough. They wanted it to be seen all over the island. When that flag went up everybody stopped. The boats in the harbor blew their whistles, their horns and everything. And we're cheering. And the Japanese, on the other hand, said that was the worst sight they ever saw – the American flag on their homeland.

On their island.

The first island we took, actually, from the Japanese.

Right. In fact, as I recall, Joe Rosenthal took the picture – that second one.

Joe Rosenthal was the official photographer. He used to come to all the Marine Corps conventions for the fifth Marine division. He just was great. And he just died recently. But he didn't think that shot was any good because there were other official Marine Corps photographers taking pictures, too. But how he timed it – it was just luck, he said. It looked like it was posed, but it wasn't posed. The six guys raised it, and you could see it all over the island. That's what we wanted. General Kuribayashi ended up on the other end, dug in, and he saw it. I never saw the other pictures – *Letters from Iwo Jima* about how the Japanese got the *Flags of Our Fathers* and how they sent letters back to Japan to tell them about the brutal fight they were in and they didn't know if they could make it. But, honest to God, it was the greatest feeling. Everybody stopped. Some guys were crying … (Mr. Smith stops momentarily). The flag went up, everybody cheered, and the whistles of the boats out on the ocean, the carriers, the battleships, everybody. And we just stood there and clapped and clapped. Because <u>now</u> we got Suribachi and they couldn't zero in on where we were from the higher elevation.
(Tape stops and restarts)
Once Suribachi was captured, and the Marines had cut them off across the island we felt comfortable. We could get hot showers and everything like that. We had the sea rations coming in. But then we advanced toward the first airfield. That was a very, very big battle. There were a lot of casualties on that because of all the caves. Thank God we had the flamethrowers and the tanks with the flamethrowers on them to burn them out. At one time – I was with so many regiments, I don't remember; I think it was the 28th Marines, Charley Company or something like that – we knew the Japs were in there. And we were up on top of their caves. And we put the flamethrower in there – the tank came up and shot it in there – they'd come running out and we were popping them off; we weren't taking any prisoners. We'd pop them off and kill them. We got through that part. But the first airfield was a very tough mission. Really tough. That was completed. We took that airfield. I don't know – I think it took us a couple of, at least a week or something like that. I was on Iwo Jima for 39 days – 38 or 39 days – before hostilities ceased and I could get home and get down to the bottom part.

And most people think that the flag went up and that was it. There was fierce fighting after that.

Oh, yeah. There was the whole other end. There were supposed to be 22,000 Japanese on there. And we killed or captured 20,000.

Wow.

We killed 20,000 and captured 2,000 – I think that's what happened. The Marine Corps, I don't know, the estimates were 72,000 killed [KIA] and about 10,000 or 12,000 wounded. It was one of the bitterest battles the Marine Corps has ever been in. That was the tough part – seeing your buddies get killed. I had two buddies get killed right next to me and one behind me. (Mr. Smith stops momentarily.)
We captured the first airfield. Now there were three airfields on Iwo Jima. The first airfield was completed. The second one was just about completed. The third one they had just started. So after we captured the first airfield, the greatest sight we saw defending that airfield, because the Japs were counterattacking all the time, a B51 landed. It had shrapnel in the wings over Japan and it was in bad shape, but it put down at Iwo Jima. When that B51 landed, the Air Corps pilot got down on the ground and kissed the ground and said, "Thank God for the Marine Corps!" A day or two later a B29 landed. That's what we took that island for – for the pilots who couldn't make it to Saipan or Guam because they were shot up, they could land at Iwo – seven hundred miles closer instead of going to the Marianas Islands. So a shot up B29 is coming in and everybody's cheering. This is what we got it for. We got it for the airmen who were hit in flight over Japan at the time. So that was great when we saw those guys come down. They'd wave to you and thank you. They were always looking for souvenirs, and I'd say, "Hey, don't touch any souvenirs – they could be booby-traps." I got enough souvenirs. I got a couple of rifles, a helmet, a canteen, flags, everything. I kept them for a long while and my wife, one day when I was traveling – I traveled all the time when I was working because of being the director of sales, I went all over the country – she gave everything away. I thought it would be worth a couple of hundred dollars if I'd kept it.

You said that you turned 19 while you were on Iwo Jima?

Yes. My birthday was April 22. Iwo Jima we invaded February 19, and I left Iwo Jima on the third or fourth week of March, and my birthday was the 22nd of April.

That was quite a birthday!

Nineteen and I'm alive. Thank God for that. But I had some good buddies killed next to me. I'm sorry. It's too bad. Jensen was his name, and Oscar something – a sniper got one right through the head; the other got hit with a grenade. We were in a fox hole and the grenade came in and I yelled "grenade." I was blown out of the fox hole from the concussion and I just have a little scratch here. But my buddy got killed. Now. We're up to the first airfield and we secured that. Then we went on to the second airfield. And

it was inch by inch, yard by yard to get these guys because they would not surrender – their motto was "Die for the emperor" – commit hara-kiri before they'd be captured. And we tried to help them die for their emperor as much as we could. About the first couple of days after we had prisoners, we had guys like MP's take them back to the camp. They only wore like little diapers around their waist, and they kept grenades under their arms.

Really.

Yeah. And we'd say, "Ha daka ni na ray" – "hands up and strip;" take your underwear off because they could carry them in. The grenades would fall off and they'd explode. So that's why we were very reluctant about taking prisoners. And when the Japs killed a Marine they'd brutalize him – cut off the parts of his body and used to put them in their mouth.

That's what I heard about. Insult to the injury.

So we wouldn't take any prisoners. Any prisoners who came out, boom. We wouldn't take a chance. To see your buddies killed by them and see what they did to them after they were dead – the dead bodies they mutilated them – it just tore your heart out. We just felt we had to get this war over quick with these bastards. So that's what happened. But we secured that island finally. Kuribayashi, from what I heard, we wanted to capture him alive, but he committed hara-kiri up in that last end of the island in a cave and the Japanese soldiers burned his body. We could never find his body. They wouldn't let him be taken down. And a lot of them committed hara-kiri there at the end. I had to go up there because there were infantry regiments there fighting. They did hard time, let's face it. I mean, I was up in front and did hard fighting, too, but the artillery was way in the back. They could be six or seven miles behind the line. But they could fire those shells so far. And then we also had a group of what we called Long Toms -- 155mm cannons – and they could fire from one end of the island to the other. They were way, way back, but they were firing also. And then we had trucks with rockets on them. So we had a lot of fire power once we got going. And flame throwers worked so good. And these tanks with flame throwers on them really could go right to the mouth of the cave and shoot the flame in there, and they'd come running out and we could pick them off.

So you were on Iwo Jima for 39 days?

I would say 38, 39 days. From the 19th of February, I would say, to almost the end of March – the 28th or 29th. They had boats there and we got on the ships to go back to Hawaii. And there was rumor at that time that the first Marine division was on Okinawa. And that was a tough battle at Sugar Loaf Ridge. And the word came down that they might detour us to help them out in Okinawa – that we weren't going back to Hawaii. But that only lasted a day. "strictly skuttlebutt. We're going to Hawaii, Thank God". And so we got on this APA and they fed us real good, and we got back to Hawaii in good shape, and when we were there and left, the regiments that got hit with the 26th, 27th and 28th – they did most of the fighting. So they got back and we went up to Camp Tarawa

again, back up in the boonies in the mountains in the volcano and trained again. The invasion of Japan – that's what we were training for the invasion of Japan, the homeland.

And what did they tell you about invading Japan – what it would be like?

They told us it would be the worst fight we'd be in, because you're not going to fight the Japanese soldier or sailor, you're not going to fight the airman unless you're a fighter pilot. You're going to fight the mother, you're going to fight the father, the grandfather, the grandmother, the child – everybody. Because they want to die for the emperor. Their religion was that if they die for the emperor they'd go to their heaven. So you had to really think about it – to kill women and children and everything like that. But I drilled into my men, "Hey. Kill or be killed." And they hide weapons, so our first mission when we got off the boat was to go around collecting guns and swords and everything like that. I was put in the MPs to secure weapons.

So you left Iwo Jima, went back to Hawaii, and trained to go to Japan. And you did go to Japan.

Yes. We landed on Japan. After Harry Truman – God bless his soul, I love you Harry – we dropped the first A-bomb on Hiroshima and the second one on Nagasaki two days later. We were going to invade the southern most island – Kyushu, the island of Kyushu. Honshu was going to be invaded by the Army. It was the biggest battle group you've ever seen – destroyers, battleships, cruisers, aircraft; everything.

You had just left Iwo Jima which was …

No we left Iwo Jima. We got back in March, and we invaded in August.

So you had time in between.

Yes – April, May, June, July.

But you had just been in this horrendous battle, and now you were going back and you were told it was going to be worse than Iwo Jima?

They said the only thing that would be worse about it was that all the Japanese are armed – knives, swords, guns, everyone had something. And they would fight to the death. They wanted to die for the emperor because they would go to their "never-never land." And they said it was going to be tough. You'd go into a house or something and knock on the door and see a mother there with a gun and a little baby on her side or something like that and you have to shoot her.

It takes a lot of training, first of all, to shoot a person – you have to change your mindset when you're going to war – and now you're talking about having to kill families. And that must have been incredibly difficult.

Well, it was very hot out. And we landed at Sasebo. And there was nobody around. We made the landing and made camp there for a while. And there was a building there that we took over for our headquarters. We didn't see any Japs or anything for six or seven days. The first ones who came down were little children. And we gave them chewing gum, K-rations at the time had candy. Then the adults started coming down. None of them carried guns. None of them carried knives or swords. So we knew then that we were safe. We wouldn't have to go into a home unless a guy was fanatical and shoot somebody or kill somebody. So after we got established in the camp we went house to house to house taking weapons away and blowing up the explosives. Guns of Sasebo and Nagasaki, artillery pieces and naval gunfire where they blew them up. And they took our orders very well, and didn't disobey. After we collected the weapons we were transferred, because at that time people started coming home. It was on the points system. And I had enough points, but being in communications they needed people like me – other guys could go home, but I stayed. We were transferred from Sasebo to Nagasaki. And Nagasaki, like I said, had been bombed by the A-bomb. Buildings were shattered and everything. I've got pictures somewhere at home, but I couldn't find them. It was just horrendous to see the destruction that the A-bomb did. Like I said, if it wasn't for Harry Truman I don't think I'd be sitting here today.

You said you saw bodies floating in the River?

Yes. When we went up there it was after the A-bomb. But there were still bodies out in the ocean as we came into the harbor. We had a beautiful building – it had been headquarters for some Japanese admiral they had shot. The Sea-Bees, God bless them. Oh. I should mention the Sea-Bees on Iwo Jima. They came in there the third, fourth day at the latest. They built showers for us – they had hot showers for us – I can't thank the Sea-Bees enough. I think they did a fantastic job. We got off the line and could go back and take a hot shower and eat a hot meal. You could wash your dungarees. You were filthy, really filthy. And you only had an extra set, so if you wore out one you had the other one for life! But I can't thank the Sea-Bees enough; they did such a fantastic job. Building showers, getting hot chow. They were so grateful that we did such a good job up on the other end. Once the island was secured they just waited around, ate drank and be merry, but we couldn't. Oh, we found some sake but I didn't like it.

You said the people started coming down.

Yes. Little boys and girls came down first – five or six years old. Little tots. Little kimonos, little pants on. And they held out their hand and kept bowing. So I said, "Give them some of your candy and K-rations." When they got that their eyes popped out of their head. They ran back and the elderly came down. We had K-rations stacked up and everything so we said to give it to them. They were hungry and probably hadn't had any food.

Winning their hearts.

Yeah. Winning them over. And they knew that we could harm them – we had our rifles there and guns. And in Nagasaki I had a side arm because I was driving a jeep on MP duty for a while. It was just fantastic how they embraced us and we embraced them.

That's surprising considering the culture.

So that worked out fine that we didn't have to kill any civilians. We didn't have to do anything to them. And we found on Sasebo – that was a big naval port – they had these two-man submarines, like Kamikaze airplanes. They had little motor boats about ten or twelve feet long with torpedoes sticking out front. And their job was to ram the ships as a suicide mission. So we had to destroy all those ships.

So how long were you in Japan?

We got there in August, like I said, after both the bombs were dropped. And the peace was signed on the Missouri. God bless MacArthur and Admiral Nimitz. Oh, that's another thing. Admiral Nimitz went down to Iwo Jima and sent a note to General Holland M. Smith, and he said, "Uncommon valor is a common virtue for the Marine Corps."

That's on the memorial.

Yes. Uncommon valor is a common virtue for all the Marines on Iwo Jima and especially those who died. They finally built a Marine Corps cemetery there, and I got the program I'd like to read to you at the end. (Mr. Smith is looking through things.) Oh, I can't read it. I forgot my glasses.

Would you like me to read it for you?

Yes. Just at the very end. This is it here.

I will read it. At the very end, you said. Okay.
So, you left Japan.

Yes. I was frozen because of the nature of my duties, and we were put on MP duty in Nagasaki just to keep peace. And we had problems with – see these young troops came over from the States who were never in combat, never in battle. And they thought they were the conquering heroes. Unfortunately, true as true to be, we had red light districts there. We had some that were for blacks and some that were for whites. But they'd go up and beat girls and bust in the houses. So we had to be very strict with these guys. These people were peaceful now. You're not taking revenge on them. You were never in combat. But they'd get drunk and said, "Let's go kill a Jap or something." But we kept them under control as far as we could, which was good. And once they knew we were patrolling with them and we were armed, if they didn't stop we'd shoot them. We had orders, if they didn't stop when they were beating up on somebody – don't take the chance. We carried a billy-club, too. But in the Marine Corps we could wear MP, or SP

for Shore Patrol. But that was the only problems we had with them. And once they knew we were patrolling in an area, they'd confine themselves, behave themselves, which was good. I had a buddy I went to high school with, his name is Jack Perry. He was on a ship in harbor– I think he was on a destroyer – out in the bay at Nagasaki. He got liberty to come ashore for two days. And I saw Jack and he said the first thing he wanted to do was go see a girl. We made them take a pro-kit – what we called a pro-kit – for disease after they came out – wash your hands, wash your body, put this pro-kit on or you can't leave. But Jack Perry got called back to the ship. But I stayed there until – let's see. We landed in August. We were in Sasebo for about a month and went to Nagasaki. I would say I was in Japan for six months, I guess, or more. But we used to get V-mail – phototype letters where they where they made it into mail. And like I say, living in Japan was great. We had our own beer parlors and you could get Japanese beer. And there was a Catholic church there and we could go to Mass. Of course we had our own chaplains with us who said Mass – Father O'Brien said Mass and was with us whenever he was available. That was easy living to us because the war was over, we were relaxing. We only had to make sure the troops didn't get out of hand with their beer and sake and stuff like that.

So how long were you there.

I'd say we got there at Sasebo for about three or four weeks and went to Nagasaki. I think I started to head home in April or May. I came back on a heavy cruiser – USS Des Moines, a heavy cruiser.

So you had your twentieth birthday in Japan.

Yes.

Your nineteenth birthday on Iwo Jima and your twentieth birthday in Japan.

Twentieth birthday in Japan. No, my nineteenth birthday was aboard ship. Because we were off Iwo at the end of March and I was aboard ship going back to Hawaii. One thing we heard on ship, too, that depressed everybody was that President Roosevelt died. I remember we were all stunned, and said prayers for FDR., which was nice. Admiral Nimitz gave a talk that he piped into the ships about what a great president he was.

So you ended up going back to Hawaii from Japan?

Yes. Once we got to Hawaii we changed from Japan. So I was 19 years old (Indistinct).

So you left Japan to go home. Were you being discharged?

Yes. I was being discharged.

Where were you discharged?

Well, we landed on San Pedro Island and we went to Camp Pendleton. We stayed there for about a week while they processed stuff. I got a set of dress blues and everything. We got transferred on a train to Great Lakes.

Was it a troop train or just a passenger train?

No. A lot of guys were being discharged. So they put us on that and they took us to Chicago. And then we went from Chicago up to Great Lakes Naval Training Station where we were processed out.

And you were discharged there. So you were 20 years old?

No. I had just turned 21 because this was in 1946. I was in the Marine Corps for three years. So it was about 1946 I got an honorable discharge.

That Marine recruiter lived up to his promise. You saw a lot of action!

I saw the best action in the world. And Japan was a nice ending. Because it was a beautiful country if you could go up. And the MP duty was something you had to do to patrol the other troops coming in from the States. We used to call them "Boots." They thought they were the warriors. But once they settled down they were fine.

When you got back to the Chicago area, did your family know you were coming?

Oh, yeah. I called them from Great Lakes. I'd get on the North Shore train, come in and the North Shore train stopped at Wilson Avenue. I had my ribbons and everything on.

Your uniform?

Oh, yeah. Because we had no civilian clothes. And I got off at Wilson Avenue and took a cab home to my house. And my Mom and Dad were standing outside waiting.

So were your brothers back?

My brother Ray got discharged before me. He got discharged around Christmas of 1945, so he was there when I got home in 1946. I was younger than him. He was two years older than me. He went in, I think it was in February of 1942. So he served his time. He got home for Christmas of 1945. I got home in the spring of 1946.

Six months later or something like that. It must have been a very good year for your parents to have you both home.

Oh, yes. We had the two stars in the window. But my sister, Pat, she joined – it wasn't the WAVES, it was something like air training or something.

Army Air Corps?

No. She was training in the Air Corps. She was in six months and didn't like it. But she was a civilian so she didn't swear in or anything. She came back home. But my mother and father had three stars in the window and took one down because she wasn't in the service. My whole family was in it for a while. My sister Pat was living down in Florida and her husband was a Sea-Bee.

So what was the first thing you did when you got home?

The first thing I did when I got home, I told my mother to have lots and lots of cold milk – ice cold milk. Because I wasn't 21 yet. Wait – I was 21. So she had a meal for me. My Mom used to make pork tenderloin rolled up and put stuffing in it, with mashed potatoes and gravy. That was great. I went through that very quickly. A lot of cold milk, and they had Coke and everything like that. But I was 21, I could legally drink. My brother came home and said, "Come on, I'm going to take you to a place in Chicago where we all are hanging out." There was a place on Bryn Mawr and Broadway on the north side where I grew up called Monaca's and Roche. And I went in there in my uniform, and everybody was cheering and clapping, "You're home, you're back." And Ralph Monaca, owner, was a personal friend of mine. I stayed by him until he passed away. I used to do a lot of favors for him. And he said, I was truly his best friend. He said, "You'll never spend a dime in this tavern. And I said, "I'm legal now!" But it was a happy homecoming. My brother lent me one of his blue suits that fit me – single-breasted. And I called up my girl, Alice, and we went out that night. We went down to the Ivanhoe, by the way – took a streetcar down there because I didn't have a car – and we had a nice evening. I walked her home, gave her a big kiss and hug and said we'd be getting together. But the good part of my discharge coming home is my mother worked for the Santa Fe Railroad. And she did a lot of favors for movie stars – Lana Turner, Ty Power -- used to send her stuff. And she got to know this guy that owned Heartsong Buick on north Clark Street. And she said, my youngest son is being discharged, and he saved a lot of money, and wants to buy a car. This guy was waiting for a year, a year and a half. I got a car in a week! A black car. He said it was a super Buick and I said I'd be down to get it. So I paid off the car and drove the car home with my father. But I was the first guy to have a car. Other guys were waiting for a car for a year. I said, "Thank God my mother did favors for Mr. Heartsong." Heartsong Buick on Clark Street. And I started my civilian life. I went to work in July for a major transportation company at that time. It was called Red Star Transit. Then I switched to a company called ICX and that's when I started traveling all over the country. Then I went with a company called Time-DC. Time D.C. was the first carrier at that time to go coast to coast non-stop. The carriers on the west coast used to come to Chicago and give it to carriers who went to the east coast. They could make it in six days.

And you did that – that was your whole career with that one company?

Yes. With that one company.

And you married Alice?

No! (Ms. Barrett laughs) It's a long story here, but I'll shorten it. I got this job at Red Star Transit, a carrier into Detroit and Toledo, Ohio, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Buffalo. They do a lot of business in Ohio, Michigan and areas of New York. And my wife, Margaret was the receptionist, her maiden name was Golik. She lived right on the south side of 31st and Avers. She was a receptionist. I was dating two models at the time. One was named Gloria and one was named Marilyn. You could say I was not a bad looking guy. Oh, I forgot to tell you – I danced with movie stars at the Hollywood Canteen, also. But Margaret used to intercept my calls all the time. I guess she kind of had a feeling for me. And this Marilyn would call and say, "How come you didn't call me back?" And I said I left a message with the receptionist. So I'd go out and say, "Marge, did you get a message?" And she'd say, "Oh, yeah, I forgot. Here it is." She didn't want me to go out with anybody but her. So I didn't get married until I was 30 years old. I was free, white and 21. I had a beautiful car, I was romancing girls, going out regularly on the expense account, Algauers and all the fancy restaurants. And I loved my job and I loved my work and I loved the girls I was with. But it didn't last (both laugh) But I dated a lot of girls and had a lot of fun. I didn't think anything about getting serious. And I dated Marge at the end. We went to Wisconsin – we knew people who had cottages up there, spent some time with them and went fishing and everything. So she became my wife. We got married in 1955. We had our 50th anniversary in 2005. But unfortunately I had all these plans made secretly. I was going to take her to Hawaii for three weeks – first class on United, and stay at the Hilton near Diamond Head on the big island. And then stay at the Sheraton. I liked the big island because I had spent so much time there. Unfortunately at that time I was getting cramps in my legs at night for some reason. And I got out of bed to my exercises. And I put my right leg down and it gave out and I fell back and I broke my tail bone. And that was the worst pain I ever experienced in my life. So they rushed me to the emergency room at Hinsdale Hospital. And the orthopedic surgeon, Dr. Michael Collins, said of all the breaks you could get this is the worst one because we can't do anything with it – you can't set it, you can't put anything in it. He said the only thing he could do was get all the pain killers I could handle. There's only one bad problem – they tie you up in knots. I said, hey, I got this pain. I get out of bed in the morning and scream because the pain is so bad. He said that's like a center for all your nerves going into that one little pocket. Fortunately, it didn't hurt right away. We had a date with one of my friends to go out to dinner the next night. Went out to dinner, had a couple of drinks, drove the car home. Marge and I got into bed and all of a sudden I got this pain in my leg – this cramp – and I got up and fell backward and that was it. I told Marge I couldn't get up because of the pain.

So you settled in. You ended up getting married.

We lived up in Rogers Park for the first four or five years. Then we moved to brand new apartments in Schiller Park because I was flying out of O'Hare a lot. When I moved to Clarendon Hills, Clarendon Hills is between Midway and United. So I could fly out of each one. There's not a state I didn't go in during my 50 years of working. The only

thing I missed was Idaho and Montana. I made Oregon, Washington, California, Massachusetts, New York, Florida – you name it – Ohio, Michigan.

Now, you're back in civilian life. Do you keep in touch, or have you kept in touch?

I keep in touch with one guy. At the Marine Corps reunions I used to see everybody. But, I hate to say this, but most guys I was close with are already dead. George Taborn died, Porky died, Joe Pelton died, M. Reese died. They're all dead. The only one that I know who was in communications who is still alive – his name is Tommy Reekes and he lives in Ohio. And he doesn't travel anymore either because he's got problems with arthritis and everything.

Do you belong to some veterans organizations?

I belong to American Legion Post 273, (a Marine post), life member of Amvets. I was Vice Commander for the Marine Corps 273 of the American Legion downtown at the Midland Hotel. That's where I met my friend, Ira Hamilton Hayes, who raised the flag on Iwo Jima.

One of the flag raisers.

Right. We took care of him. We got him an apartment, got him a job – everything. But unfortunately he just couldn't stop drinking. He'd drink a beer or two and be fine, but he got into work at International Harvester and he'd show up to work drunk. I hate to say it, God bless him – he was the nicest guy in the world.

It was too much for him.

Yes. And the police would call me at home because I lived close to Chicago when I was up in Rogers Park. So I'd drive downtown and get him out and they wouldn't charge him with anything – disorderly conduct – and let him out. But then he'd start drinking again in a couple of days. But he finally came to one of the meetings and said I'm going back to my homeland to Arizona. I said that was the best thing. He'd be with his own people and could get on with his life there. Sure enough he went back. He said good-bye to us – we had a going away party at the Marine Corps post. He went back on the train and four months later I read it in the paper that he had died on the reservation.

You've had a lot of very difficult experiences as a Marine. How did your military experiences affect your thinking?

Well, at one time in the trucking industry – the transportation industry – I used to call on Japanese people. And me being kind of like a boss, I'd take the accounts that were difficult to crack and I'd secure them. One of my best friends, Ken Um`eko, was traffic manager at Sony. And I would call on him and we'd bring the TV's and everything in from the west coast ports – San Pedro or Long Beach were the big ones – put them on our trucks and drive them up to Skokie where the office and the warehouse was – big TV's,

radios, everything. When I first saw Kenji I just cringed. He said, "What's wrong." And I said I was kind of cold. He was so nice. Finally we got to be best of friends. We'd go out to lunch together. I told him I fought in Japan. He asked me how many Japanese I killed. I said I killed several – four or five, but I didn't count. And we became very good friends. And then there was another one from Mitsubishi or Panasonic. His name was Hajai. Those were the only two Japanese I called on. At first it was difficult. But when you got to know them, took them out to lunch, shared a few drinks. They used to call it Kirin beer. They used to sell it in Chicago. So we'd drink Kirin beer and everything was fine. So that was the only problem. Then I turned the accounts over when I started traveling all over. Like I said, I traveled all over the country. I'd come home on Friday night, emptied my suitcase, my poor wife would wash the clothes. And the first thing she did when she'd meet me at the plane, she'd ask "Where are we going to eat?" I said I'd been eating out every day – breakfast, lunch and dinner. Most of them hot dogs and beans. But there was a place on Ogden Avenue right off the Tri-State called the Cypress Restaurant. And they had a pub room with big hamburgers, beer and all that. So we used to take the kids – the kids would come with us – and we'd stop there and have dinner. And one of my dear friends that my father worked with, owned Andy's Steakhouse. We became friends and we ate at Andy's Steakhouse out on Butterfield Road. So those were our two favorite restaurants. And everybody knew us in there. As a matter of fact, the waitress, Grandma D we called her, she's now working at the nursing home in Hinsdale. But she also says the rosary a couple of times a week at Notre Dame Parish. And I only go to Mass on Tuesdays and Thursdays and we go on Sundays. Her nickname was Grandma D. And she was the oldest waitress working at the Cypress. She'd have a party every five years. And the last year she made a party it was for our 35th anniversary. And everything was paid for. And that's about the story of my life. But I did have bad dreams for a while. I thought I had a touch of malaria. They checked me out and said I had a slight case but nothing to worry about.

Okay. Is there anything that we haven't covered that you'd like?

Only that I'm happily married and that the greatest thing in my life is my two granddaughters – little Morgan` and little Maggie; my daughters Lisa and Tara who are wonderful. It's a blessing to have daughters like that. My daughter, Lisa, is chief clinical dietician at Little Company of Mary Hospital. And My daughter, Tara, works for Just Ducky. She also works for a friend of hers and appraises property. And they both are very good. My daughter, Lisa, graduated cum laude from Northern Illinois. She does real well. She has the two daughters. My other daughter didn't have any children. She didn't want them I guess. She's got dogs. She's had three dogs at one time. Now she's down to two. That's about it. But, like I said, I thank our Lord for saving me.

Did you want me to read this for you?

Yes.

God saw that you were getting tired and a cure was not to be. So he put his arms around you and whispered, "Come to me." With tearful eyes we watched you and

saw you pass away. Although we loved you dearly, we could not make you stay. A golden heart stopped beating. Hard working hands at rest. God broke our hearts to prove to us He only takes the best. The quiet one has passed on, and the silence is thunderous. Another Marine reporting, Sir. He served his time in hell. The Iwo Jima monument on Iwo Jima.

And with that we're going off record.