INTERVIEW
of
Arwin J. Bowden, USMC

Mr. Cox: This is Floyd Cox of the Admiral Nimitz Museum in Fredericksburg, Texas, and I am here interviewing Arwin J. Bowden for the Nimitz Museum Oral History Program. I am interviewing Mr. Bowden in order obtain his recollections of the War in the Pacific during the Second World War. The interview is taking place on March 9, 2000 in San Antonio. Mr. Bowden could you tell us a little bit about your background, where you were born and when you were born?
Mr. Bowden: I was born on September 18, 1923, in Wichita Falls, Texas. My Dad helped build the Water Works there in Wichita Falls at the time and we lived out on the Old Petrolia Road, on the east side of Wichita Falls. He also had a fairly good sized garden. Called it a truck farm and sold fresh produce to people in Wichita Falls. Then we moved to Wheeler, Texas and he worked on the Water Works at Magic City, I believe it was. Then in 1926 or 1927, my uncle died in Northeastern Wilbarger County, leaving a wife and eight kids on a farm. So we moved in and Dad bought the farm adjacent my Aunt and oversaw the farming of both farms for a number of years.

I went to school in Elliott, Texas. Up in that part of the country it is commonly called the "Bugscuffle Community." In fact, we'll have another Elliott Reunion the first week-end in August, 2000. The Bowden Family is trying to co-ordinate that Reunion. Then I graduated from Oklaunion High School in 1941. I started school down at Hardin College which is now Midwestern University in Wichita Falls. My brother-in-law, Jasper Williams, lived south of Jolly, Texas. I helped him harvest the grain and plow the 200 acres of farmland that he had down there. While going to the trade school at Hardin College, I learned to operate machine tools and acetylene and arc welding. I thought I would go to work for the Defense Department at North American in Grand Prairie, so I moved to Fort Worth.

After three or four months, I found no one wanted to talk to me because I was 18 and could pass the physical to go into industrial world. I was working parking cars in a parking lot in Fort Worth and my boss was an ex-Marine and he spent a lot of time introducing me to the recruiting depot in Dallas and Fort Worth. Of course, he spent a little bit of time telling me all about the dress blue uniform, too.

Mr. Cox: The pretty part, huh?

Mr. Bowden: Yes, the pretty part. Finally, I decided that I was not going to get into the industrial world, so enlisted in the Marine Corps on May 8, 1942. We were sent to San Diego, California. For an old boy from Wilbarger County in the lush farming land in northern Texas, it was quite a shock to wake up on the T&P Railway west of Pecos out in the greasewood and sand dunes. In El Paso, we didn't see anything but the railway in our layover there. It was 20 years before I got back to El Paso, but I remember El Paso Del Norte as a stinky, dusty, little old Mexican town. As far as I was concerned, there wasn't anything famous about El Paso.

Anyway, we got to San Diego, via Los Angeles. I was assigned to Platoon 395 in the Recruit Depot at San Diego. After quite a struggle, we made it through that part of the indoctrination. I figured

we were all going into an infantry company somewhere, some kind, because they were filling out the bottom end of the Second Marine Division. So they had us lined up and asked us what we wanted to do. They said Marine Aviation Communication. I said "that is good enough" and I stepped forward. The next thing I knew, I was in radio school there on the base in San Diego. I finally graduated from that and was assigned to Company D of the Second Pioneer Battalion and that was my APO address for some time.

Mr. Cox: Let me ask you - What did you learn in Radio School, Morse Code?

Mr. Bowden: Yes, we learned International Morse Code. We had flag signal, telephone basis, electronic basis, electrical basis. We had to pass 15 words a minute to get out of Radio School. As proficiency got better, in New Zealand, I helped put out a battalion newspaper by copying from the English Language Stations the KFS in San Francisco.

Anyway, we sailed on the President Monroe somewhere around November 1, 1942. If I recall right, the President Monroe could handle about 825 - 850 paying passengers and we had over 3,000 Marines on the thing.

Mr. Cox: Wow, now that is close quarters.

Mr. Bowden: Yes, it was and of course we could quickly overrun the sanitary facilities so they built sheet iron buildings up on the aft deck and slanted the trough and pumped sea water to it twenty-four hours a day. Somewhere along the line, Lee B. Powell, who was the original Lone Ranger in our outfit, wrote a masterpiece "that stinking port side head". I may still have copy of it somewhere, but I haven't seen it lately. It was a dandy.

We landed in Wellington, New Zealand, after a direct run from San Diego. We didn't stop anywhere. We were in convoy all the way and ran straight to Wellington. Then we were moved to Paekakariki over on the West Coast of the north island, about 30 miles out of Wellington.

Mr. Cox: Let me ask you, did you know where you were headed? Once you were in New Zealand, did you know what your objective would be?

Mr. Bowden: Had no idea when we left San Diego where we were going. We just loaded up and went. And we built the camps for the three infantry regiments, the 2nd, 6th and 8th Infantry Regiments. We built our camp up in the hills and called it "Camp Judgeford." We built that the early part of January 1943. That is were we stayed until we left New Zealand. About the first of November, 1943, we loaded out. I was assigned to the part of what they called "shore party". These were people who handled the material as it was being landed on the island, supplies, that sort of thing. Being communicators the only thing we had to worry about was getting the radios and telephones set up along the beach. We had the job of communicating back to the ships and letting the ships know what we needed and where we needed it. They had that on each beach.

We left Wellington, New Zealand and went up to the New Hebrides and sat around there for a few days. Then we left in a big convoy and headed to the Gilberts. After we were out two or three days,

they told us where we were going. We were going to Tarawa Atoll and Betio in particular. That was the island that had the air strip on it and that was what we needed. The Japs hadn't quite finished the air field but they certainly had finished most all of their reinforcement in defense of the island. I have always wondered whether or not the Japanese learned a lot from our defense of Wake Island when they started setting the defenses on Betio in Tarawa. I think they learned more than we did.

I was assigned to the 3rd Battalion, Second Marines. The radio team I was with was Lanning, Hudson and myself. Laning was a Corporal, Hudson and myself were PFC. We loaded out on the landing craft and headed in. We were supposed to land about 9:00 but the Japanese got to firing back at us and we didn't think that they were going to be able to after the enormous Naval bombardment and aerial bombardment. In fact, we kind of thought that maybe the Navy was going to ship us in some ice cream about the middle of the morning.

Mr. Cox: That was a rude awakening.

Mr. Bowden: That was rude awakening. The tides were very low and the boat that I was in hit the reef. An amphibious tractor came along side. There was about 20 of us or so off loaded to the boat. Of course, we had to keep our radio team together, the three of us had to stay together because we had all the parts. Each one of us was carrying a central part of the radio station.

Mr. Cox: Now was this on the first wave?

Mr. Bowden: No, we were the third wave. By that time the Japanese had been able to reorganize after the bombardment and they came up and laid it on us. Our landing area was designated about the middle of the beach on red one, which was right in the throat of the upside down bird. We were being fired on from about 900 to 1,000 yards out. When we got in close, 200 yards or so from the beach, we really caught it then. We were almost to the waters edge when a 77 or 37 caught us in the port side and we were dead in the water. Shot a bunch of people up. Those big shells were coming through the alligator. People were getting blown all to pieces.

So I jumped out on the starboard side of the craft and landed in maybe knee-deep water. About that time the whole tank exploded and there was fire everywhere. So I tried to get under water and there wasn't much water to get under. My clothes were about all burned off me, still had my shoes and my leggings on, but my dungarees and all were pretty well burned off. I had second- and third-degree burns on my face and my arms, my back, both legs. Had shrapnel all over me. I had piece of shrapnel hit me in the left buttocks and travel up through me and then hit between the shoulder blades with a piece of it; a piece of shrapnel bounced off my skull on the right side of my head. Then I had a piece of shrapnel hit me on the left arm. It went through and bounced off my elbow bone and left a pretty good scar there for a while. Then I was about to suffocate under the water, so I came up to get a breath of air; I was still in the fire, so I went back under and moved a little farther out. I don't know how far out, I was just trying to get out of the fire. I came up, took a

big gulp of air and went back under. I said "Hey there's no fire there", so I came back up. I could

breathe a little bit. But there was so much smoke and fire; the water was on fire where the fuel from the tractor had spilled out. It gave me a lot of cover, or I would have been a sitting duck otherwise. I would have been right out in the open. There was another amtrack about 200 yards out that looked like it hadn't burned. So I started working my way out toward it; hiding behind anything that was floating in the water. If I had something to hide behind, I would rest a little bit. There was so much floating, just everything you could think of in the water. So I made it on out to the tractor. Eventually there were six of us that got behind the amphibious tractor that hadn't burned. There was a boy by the name of Lazzari, Rhodes, Castle, Quinette, Libby and myself. We were pinned down. There was no way we could go anywhere.

Mr. Cox: Let me ask you this. You probably were all about teen-agers, weren't you, about 18- or 19-years old?

Mr. Bowden: I had turned 20 in September and this was November the 20th. Oh I don't know after couple of hours there, we looked under the tractor and could actually see the Japanese defenders under the sea wall. One time I thought I was close enough that I thought I would recognize him if I met him on the street.

Mr. Cox: That's close.

Mr. Bowden: Oh, we weren't 100 yards out, we might have been a little farther than that. But anyway we were pinned down there and Lazzari decided he was going to try to make it out to a tractor a little farther out. He took off trying to run through knee-deep water. He might have made 50 feet and they hit him with automatic fire from both sides and his body was still floating face down at sunset that evening. Right out there in front of us.

When it started to get dark, we tried to move out. Castle and Rhodes had both died before noon and Lazzari was dead. So it just left Libby, Quinette and myself. Libby had a piece of rifle stock about an inch square driven in the back of his left thigh in the explosion and also had four or five 45 caliber hulls that exploded in the fire and they were deeply inbedded in his right thigh. Then Quinette, I believe it was his right leg was crushed. I don't know what happened to it. It was of no value to him. He had to swim or drag the leg where ever he went.

But as it started to get dark we moved out and got fired on and driven back to the tractor. The Japs started coming out on the reef and they were shooting and bayoneting everything that moved. Corpse, every thing else out there. One of them came up each side of the tractor and Libby grabbed the one over on the port side and he killed him. But in the process, he got his hands cut up pretty bad when he got ahold of the Jap bayonet. I think one of the guys that were dead had his rifle, it was an old M-1 and had the bayonet fixed on it. When I became aware of the Jap coming up on the starboard side, I hit him with the bayonet. Then I took off....that was the time to leave. There were some others coming after us.

Mr. Cox: You bet.

Mr. Bowden: I made it a few feet out there and a light machine gun got down on me. He acted like he

was going to cut me all to pieces. I fell in a shell hole and he quit firing. I got up and moved on after a bit. I got out to another tractor. I still had my k-bar and my knife. So I said I had to find out if there was anything or anybody up here. So I went up the side of that tractor, talking and beating on the side of it as I went. There wasn't anybody home, but I got in and felt around. There weren't even any bodies in that tractor. I felt around on the bottom and found a little package of rock hard candy. This was close to midnight and we had been in the water since 9-9:30 that morning. I also found one these inflated type belts. I took it and the candy and went back into the water.

I could hear a boat out the way. I headed out toward the sound I could hear. I didn't know how far out, but he was out beyond the edge of the reef. Just about the time I got to the deep water, Quinette came along. He and I both got on this belt and when we inflated it, only one side of the thing would inflate. But it was enough to keep us both afloat. And we moved on out. One of the smaller boats was one that landed tanks and such, not a LST. There was a big SCR-299 radio on there. I had operated that radio down in New Zealand. There was an old boy from Texas, one of our truck drivers from the Second Battalion, was on board. They looked us over and we picked up Libby.

We were over on the right hand side of the pier near an old sunken ship that the British had sunk a couple of years before. On D+1, the Japs had some machine guns set up in that old sunken ship. I think Eddie Albert was telling quite a bit about that when he was running around in his Salvage Boat picking up bodies and checking the tractors that were floating out to sea. He was part of the return to Tarawa 50 years afterward, what ever it was.

Anyway, they took us past the end of the pier over to the destroyer Ringold that was sitting over on the left side of the pier. It had been hit three different times with Japanese artillery. They took us into sick bay and patched us up as good as they could. The doctor was asking me about maybe the five or six welps on my stomach and that many more on my back. It looked like somebody have taken a riding quirt and just whipped the thunder out of me. It was those machine gun bullets before I fell in the hole out there on the reef, that old boy was just about ready to cut me in half and he was close that he put welps on my stomach and my buttocks. Anyway they patched us up and the next morning they loaded us off on another landing craft and took us out to the USS Doyen. There we got some additional medical attention.

That island stunk. We must have been two miles out, but it was a terrible smell. It was awful. I know the guys that were on the island itself, they complained about it being so stinky and hot and dusty. Of course, Tarawa is right on the equator. I wish you would have talked to Marshall Jones, he was in 1-8 that landed the morning of D+1 and they took a beating. They really took a beating.

Marshall works for the telephone company. I guess I had worked with Marshall for five years before I knew that he was in the Second Division. He has since passed away and is buried in Blanco.

Then we made a run of about 2300-2400 miles from the Gilberts into Hilo, Hawaii and off loaded those that were not wounded. The rest of us they took up to Navy Number 10 at Pearl Harbor.

When I was back in Hawaii in 1986, I told a battleship sailor that I had spent a couple of months at Navy Number 10. He said, "that is like a sick-bay on a battleship." I said, "but it was a pretty good

sized place when I was there."

Those of us that were ambulatory at Navy Number 10 were farmed out on a little parade ground we had there. Admiral Nimitz came out and made a speech. Then some of the officers with him, he didn't, came along and pinned the Purple Heart on us. I did get to see Admiral Nimitz that one time.

Mr. Cox: Let me ask you this. What was your impression of him, that one impression?

Mr. Bowden: I thought he was just easy-going. He wasn't real agitated, or anything like that. He was just a common, easy-going fellow that didn't impress me as being overly aggressive or anything like that.

Mr. Cox: Or impressed with himself, like MacArthur might have been?

Mr. Bowden: No, no, no. Those two guys were absolutely totally different as far as I could see. Maybe I shouldn't say it, but if I'd had the PR staff that MacArthur had I would probably have been the most over-rated PFC in the Marine Corps. But that's beside the point too.

Mr. Cox: It's a fact though.

Mr. Bowden: Of course, after MacArthur went back to the Philippines, the Marine Corps had a 155 artillery outfit that went along with them. This was published in the Marine Corps papers. They had a sign out in front of their 155 headquarters saying "By the Grace of God and a few Marines, MacArthur came back to the Philippines." Now you got me off on a subject that was just part of the war in the South Pacific.

Anyway, we got to Pearl about the 5th of December. Then I was in the Navy Hospital there till the middle of January. They dug out some of the stuff and patched me up, treated my burns and had to take a new picture of me, all that sort of thing.

Mr. Cox: Let me regress a little bit. You had all these wounds and you were out there on the wrecked amtrack, did you have any morphine, or any kind of painkiller.

Mr. Bowden: Nothing.

Mr. Cox: Just toughed it out.

Mr. Bowden: It was the only thing we could do. And it was surprising how clearly you can think and how clear your mind is even though you are beat all to pieces. There were a couple of times there that I kind of faded off, I just wondered if I was going to die right there. No, we didn't have morphine to even give the guy that were beat up a whole lot worse than I. I thought I was pretty

fortunate compared to Libby and Quinette. Of course, Castle and Rhodes and Lazzari were dead by noon. As far as I know, we had a 13-man communications section and a 20-man group that were to act

as security and unloaders on the beach, Libby and Quinette and myself were the only survivors out of the 33 men.

Mr. Cox: Boy that is a high casualty rate.

Mr. Bowden: Well, there is no good reason why it wasn't 100% because they had every chance in the world to kill all three of us too.

But after staying a couple of months at Pearl Harbor at Navy Number 10, they sent me out to the replacement depot. We called it "the Dust Bowl" and I think it is now the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific. I was out there waiting for transportation to my unit down on the Big Island. Went back down there, rejoined the unit and couple of days after I got back down there, they made me a Corporal. Man, I was making $64 a month. We, the Second Battalion, worked the piers. We were actually doing stevedore work is what we were doing. Most of the guys were, I was still in the communications end. We set up BD-72 switchboard in one of the gun towers. We were actually quartered in an old POW camp just out of Hilo. Then we went up to Camp Tarawa up on the other end of the island, on the other side of Molokai.

We trained up there for the next operation. We set up a PA and telephone and radio system for a British Officer who came in and demonstrated the Light Tank with the flame thrower on it. This thing could throw a stream of burning napalm 140 yards. That was kind of scary for me because it hadn't been but about three or four months that I had been burned pretty good. I didn't relish fooling with that thing. We loaded out and maneuvered off the island and landed on the island of Maui and practiced landing. Then we went from there to Eniwetok in the Marshall Islands and from there to the Mariannas.

In the interim, we had gone out to the beach in Honolulu. When we got back to the ship, I was called up to report to a Lt. Sabaskinski. This old boy had been on the Fordham University foot ball team and he was a great big rascal. His fist was as big as both of mine put together. We went out to the Dust Bowl and picked up an 81mm mortar platoon. These kids had just come from the states, they were raw recruits. Had very little training in mortars and I didn't know anything about mortar. I was a communicator. I was a radio and telephone man, I didn't know anything about mortars.
But, what the heck. Anyway we took these guys aboard ship and wet-nursed them all the way to Saipan. When we got to Saipan, we were still aboard ship with these mortar people. Some of the wounded were being brought on-board ship. We finally went down the nets and were circling around waiting to go in and here is this radio man out there with a bunch of mortar people and I was supposed to be in charge.

Mr. Cox: Had to earn that $64.

Mr. Bowden: I was fixing to earn it, I guarantee. While I was circling around with the mortar platoon, here came a Captains skiff, a speed boat running off there. I was ordered aboard this speed

boat and it seemed that they wanted me to go back to communications. So we went over to an amphibious tractor sitting and waiting for me. When I got there, there were about five other guys on

board and they had their radio gear and some water. Then they got me and we made a wild run into the beach. We landed just about the junction of, I think, Green 1 and Red 3. We hit the beach and this old boy ran us across the Charan Kanoa airstrip. He took us clear across the airstrip into a little brushy area.

Mr. Cox: You were on one of these track vehicles?

Mr. Bowden: I was on what we called the "alligator". Now they had some different versions that were called buffalo. Then they started arming those and putting a lot heavier armor on these amphibious tractors later on. He ran us across the strip and dropped us in this little brushy area and sweetly asked us to get off his craft in a hurry. In so many words.

We unloaded and we looked around there. And, friend, there ain't no Marines on that side of the airstrip. So we decided that the best thing for us to do was to grab our gear and head back across the airstrip to get back over where we had some friends. Sure enough, there was a couple of snipers out there that got to working on us. None of us got hit but we lost two five-gallon cans full of water what had taken hits. We lost those. Some of our clothing was hit. So we had bullet holes through our clothes, through our trousers. But we got in and then we set up our radio there. Then after a while we moved on up. They pulled us off the beach. We were taking quite a few casualties in the infantry regiments. They moved a special troop off the beach. We had pretty well secured the beach and supplies were coming in. We were in pretty good shape there. So they took us and our radios and we went on up with the infantry up under Mt. Topatchau, which is a little mountain in the middle of the Island, about 1500-2000 feet up.

We fooled around there for a few days. Then we went back on the west side and went into the city of Garapan, the capitol of the northern Mariannas. The Japanese had blown the thing all to pieces. There were a lot of sea mines at the intersections of the streets and a lot of snipers. We got into checking out some cellars and I ran into a complete set of hand-painted china, dishes, and I wish I had a way to get them back home. I had a rifle and a radio and no way to do that.

The first night we spent in Garapan, we set our radio up in a concrete building. That was a Japanese burial crypt. They had shelves all the way around and urns setting all over the place. We set up our radio in there. Then the 27th Army Division cut across us and took over the front lines about the middle of the afternoon. We fell back about 1/2 or a mile back. About 2 in the morning, the Japanese made their final run at us. And they overran the Army front lines and our 10th Marines were supporting the Army's artillery. We lost 5 -105 Artillery pieces in that blast. So we were back in line pretty quickly.

By daylight we were back up into the lines. There at the north end of the island, it was kill or be killed. That was all there was to it. There was probably in a 1/2 mile area, right north of where the 27th front lines were, 3,000 Jap bodies. They sent bulldozers to cut trenches. Then the same

bulldozers just pushed the bodies into the trenches and covered them up. Then we went to the north end of the island. Some of them surrendered, some of them wouldn't. Those that wouldn't should have.

It was a sad thing to see the Japanese families that were so afraid of us that they would actually take the whole family and jump off these cliffs and kill the whole bunch. Yet back when we were moving up on Topatchau there was a native Charmarro lady came in carrying a baby, she had just given birth and the baby wasn't an hour old. We put her on a stretcher and sent her and the baby back to the division hospital. The thing I remember most about that incident is that you never saw so many flies in all your life. The baby and the mother both just covered with flies. Anyway we got them back.

After the island was secured, I don't remember how many casualties we had on Saipan. The island was 4 miles wide and 10 miles long, something like that. Where Tarawa/Betio was about 290 acres. We had the job of jumping across the strait that was about 3 miles over to Tinian. We had made a feint landing down by the Tinian town which was toward the southern end of the island. The object was to get the Japanese to bring all their forces down to oppose us and that would open up White 1 and White 2 on the northwest end of the Island. The Fourth Marine Division hid up there . Late on the afternoon of J-Day, I went ashore with the First Battalion of the Eighth Marines. We went straight ahead from the landing beaches and captured Ushi Air Field and then we drove to the east side of the Island and turned south. That put the Fourth Division on the western side of the island and the Second was on the east side. We drove down the island and there was just no return - that was all there was to it. You knew that you surrendered, you fought or you were killed. We had all of that.

We went down through there. It was flat farm land and very meticulously kept farms.

Mr. Cox: Reminds you of West Texas?

Mr. Bowden: Almost. Not quite, but almost.

On the third or fourth day on the island, we came to this one spot and here is a big garden and it had black-eyed peas and okra and all kinds of radishes and this sort of thing. Being an old country boy, we took that okra and black-eyed peas and threw them in a helmet and fired them up and cooked them and ate them. It was pretty good.

Then we discovered that the garden was watered and fertilized by the rainwater that came off the top of these big outdoor, as we say in the Marines and in the Navy, the heads.

Mr. Cox: The privies.

Mr. Bowden: The privies?

Mr. Cox: Yeah.

Mr. Bowden: Well, all that water that fell on the top of that thing flushed all the remains out on the garden. That was the way they watered it and fertilized the garden. Anyway the okra and black-eyed peas were eaten. We decided we had better go back to the C-rations and eat the meat and beans three times a day.

After that we went back to Saipan. I think it was the 16th of August of 1945 that they deactivated the 18th Regiment. We went over into the Second Joint Assault Signal Company, called the Second JASCO.

There were three segments in this Company. One was the Shore Party Group: Since I had the experience in Shore Party, I stayed with this group. I was promoted to Sergeant over there.

Mr. Cox: How much were you making then?

Mr. Bowden: $78 a month. I was in real high cotton.

Then they had the Naval Gun Fire Control Group and the Naval Air Liaison Group. This group of communicators took care of the air strikes. This group of communicators took care of the Naval gun fire. We in the Shore Party took care of the supplies that were coming in. But that was our job and whatever job they gave us, that was what we did.

After we replaced all the casualties and such and got the company built up to strength, we got everything ready to go. We had already loaded aboard ship.

You know when you are onboard a troop transport and you get into chow line, you don't get out of it for any reason. You stay in that chow line until you have eaten. Just as I was stepping into the door of the galley, they called me to report to the Officer of the Day. I said, "There ain't no way, I'm gonna eat." So the old boy just came and fell in line with me and ate with me.

Mr. Cox: Cut the chow line, huh?

Mr. Bowden: He cut it. It's a wonder he wasn't thrown overboard, but he cut it. After I got through eating, I went to the Officer of the Deck and he said to get my gear, I was going back to the island. So I got my gear and reported back to Captain Moss over at the Second JASCO and was told I was heading for the States.

It must have been a week or two later, I was dispatched down to the Island Provost Marshall and he gave me a charge of six young Marines who had been convicted of deserting in the face of the enemy and had been given General Court Martials. It was my job to deliver them from Saipan in the Mariannas to Marine Barracks in Seattle, Washington via Honolulu.

He said "I want to tell you one thing. If one of these guys go overboard and we find him, he had better have a bullet hole in him."

Mr. Cox: That was telling you one thing, wasn't it?

Mr. Bowden: He told me that no body fooled with my prisoners and that was the way it was. We landed in Seattle and went down to Treasure Island. I got a thirty-day delay in route to Camp Lejeune

in North Carolina. That ruined me, when they gave me the thirty-day leave, I was ready to get out. If they had left me overseas, I could have done 20 standing on my head, but when they gave me a thirty-day leave and brought me home - Forget it man, I was a civilian Marine, I was out. I wanted out, but I had signed up for 4 years, so there was no way to get out. I had to serve out my enlistment.

I wound up in Lejeune and brought my wife up and we spent a couple of months up there and I finished it off. Then bought an old 1937 Dodge from a guy from Michigan. One of the Marines there. I think I gave $350 for that old Dodge. And this was in 1946. We drove all the way back to Texas in that thing. That was our transportation back to Texas. It didn't make any difference how we got here, we were ready to come home.

Mr. Cox: You wanted to go to Texas?

Mr. Bowden: You betcha.

They had planned some quick training and we would be going back for the invasion of Japan. We would have been the second or third echelon after the initial landing. I didn't want any part of that. I tell you I'm glad that Harry dropped that A-Bomb. And they flew the plane with the A-Bomb from the Ushi Air Strip that we captured on Tinian. By the time we got to the south end of the Island, they were already starting to clear that out and rebuild and enlarge it. B-29's were already landing on Saipan at that time.

There are some funny stories about that too, but we won't get into them. I will say this that there are some B-29 crews that swapped a fifth of whiskey for some old Marine generated Japanese battle flags.

Mr. Cox: Home-made.

Mr. Bowden: If they ever washed them the red ink would have come out.

Floyd, I wouldn't take a million dollars for the experience, but I wouldn't give you a dime for another minute of it. There are so many retired military around Fort Sam Houston and they can't understand why I didn't want a military career. I had no desire, none, zilch, none of it. I was through. I gave them four years and that was it.

Mr. Cox: Well, thank you very much for a very interesting story. I really appreciate your taking the time. Like I told you, there is nothing like hearing it from a guy who was there.

Mr. Bowden: Well, this is March of 2000 and from November 20, 1943, until early 1945, that is a long time. That is 50 - 55 years ago. This is just the way I remember it. People that were with me nearly all the way will remember it differently. Basically it is all the same. It is just personal remembrance.

Mr. Cox: Memories you will never forget.

Mr. Bowden: Not likely. Some of them are just as fresh as if they happened yesterday. That few hours on that reef at Tarawa are just as vivid right now, as they were the day it happened. Never forget it.

Mr. Cox: Well, thank you very much.

Mr. Bowden: You are quite welcome.

Transcribed, May, 2000
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