

*Interview of
Sergeant Ramon Acuna
Company B
158 Infantry - Bushmasters*

Transcribers Notes: The interviewer did not identify himself, but sometime during the tape the transcriber realized that Lt. Braun was talking. The word “Interviewer” is used because the transcriber felt there were more than two people involved conducting the interview.

Interviewer: This morning I have driven down to Benson, Arizona, and I am going to have an interview with Ramon Acuna. If I sound a bit prejudiced all during the interview, we are going to do two separate recordings. We are going to do one for the Oral History of the Bushmasters, keeping it on a fairly serious level. Then we are going to do a separate recording because Ray happened to be one of my favorite guys in the outfit and we were always in hell together and all kinds of trouble. He has a lot lighter side stories, we were together all the way back until we got into the hospital in San Francisco. So this first tape is going to be the regular fairly serious job, and the other tape will be for use in the other book. Now I will start with Ray. Ray, did you have any nicknames before you went into the service?

Mr. Acuna: Even to this day, around here in Benson. they call me the “crazy man.” El Loco.

Interviewer: El Loco? Since Tony is a linguist, you can figure that one out. We are conducting this interview in Ray’s hometown of Benson, Arizona. Were you born in Benson?

Mr. Acuna: I was born in Mexico.

Interviewer: You were born in Mexico? When were you born?

Mr. Acuna: April 16, 1916.

Interviewer: Hey, you're in good shape.

Mr. Acuna: I'm an old man.

Interviewer: You are only three years older than I am. What was your father's occupation?

Mr. Acuna: He was a miner.

Interviewer: Where did you go to school?

Mr. Acuna: I went to school at St. David in Arizona. I started from the very first grade there and graduated from St. David. St. David is in a Mormon community and I was the gentile in the entire school. Everybody there were Mormons. They belonged to the Church of Latter Day Saints. I guess if it hadn't of been for those wonderful people I would have never graduated. They treated me just like one of their own.

Interviewer: What day did you enter into the service?

Mr. Acuna: I entered the service on February 7, 1941.

Interviewer: Did you go directly into the Bushmasters?

Mr. Acuna: Right into Company B, 158th Infantry.

Interviewer: Had you been active in any sports in school?

Mr. Acuna: I was in basketball and baseball. I was on the baseball team when I was a sophomore. I played short stop. In my last year, I pitched for St. David. Never won a game, I pitched.

In basketball, I was all Southern Conference forward in 1935. We were battling teams like Tucson, Bisbee, Douglas, Class A teams. At that time, Tucson only had one school, Tucson Union High School. Bisbee the same way, they only had one. And we were battling the gigantic teams and I made all Southern Conference forward playing for St. David .

Interviewer: Did you have any hobbies? Outside of girls.

Mr. Acuna: Oh, that was the only hobby I had when I was going to school. I used to tell jokes, I can't remember any now.

Interviewer: What was your height and weight and distinguishing characteristics that you had?

Mr. Acuna: The first day I joined the service, I weighed 110 pounds and I was 5 foot 8 inches. I had a tattoo put on in a drunken stupidity over here in a restaurant in Benson, the letters SDHS for St. David High School.

Interviewer: Who were your best friends?

Mr. Acuna: In the Army was Mel Passey (sp) and Joe Hall. Joe Hall was from Glendale and Passey from Mesa.

Interviewer: Are you still in touch with any of the people from the 158th?

Mr. Acuna: I am in touch with Passey. I have his phone number. Of course, there is another gentlemen over in Hollywood. His name is Vaughn. We call each other every once in a while. We reminisce about the good ole days, about the 158th, B Company. The good times and of course, the terrible times that we had over there.

Interviewer: You never got into trouble together, did you?

Mr. Acuna: Not that I remember.

Interviewer: Do you have any photographs of you as a young man, or in service, or any articles, diaries, letters dating back to those times?

Mr. Acuna: No, I don't have hardly anything that reminded me of the service.

Interviewer: I see you have a wall full of decorations and medals, there and we are going to touch on those later, but right now we will go on with this. You are well aware of what has been going on in Arizona for many years and we finally got our recognition last year. Had you been familiar with or had friends in any of the Indian tribes before you went into service?

Mr. Acuna: No. In fact, I never came into contact with any of them until after I was in. They had

one platoon of Indians in B-Company.

Interviewer: One full platoon. These were some of the reformatory boys that Captain Irvin (sp) told us about. He inherited a lot of the trouble-maker Indians. What did you think of them as soldiers? What did you think of them as friends as you got to know them?

Mr. Acuna: They were well-liked. They were nice. They were just like any ordinary person.

Interviewer: What was one of your funniest memories? That we can go into detail on another tape, but let's hit on some of those because I know that you do have some funny ones and we were discussing them before.

Mr. Acuna: Well, I don't know there were so many of them. Now that I look back, they were extremely funny at that particular time, at that particular moment. But then again, when it actually happened, it wasn't funny a bit. I can remember a lot of times some the things that I did and got away with that I should have never done.

One time in Panama, we had credit at a little bar. We called it "Sardine" because we ate sardines there all of the time. Me and Guthrie and Ogle (sp) and Hugus (sp). We went to this town and got drunk. Coming back, we each had a quart of rum, so we decided to take a short cut. So instead of taking the short cut, we walked right out into thin air and fell right down into a ravine with great big boulders, I guess they must have weighed about 1,000 tons each. Great, great big boulders, about 20 feet down.

We just sit there. The first thing I grabbed for was my whiskey to see if I have broken it. We just sat there and sipped all night long, because we didn't know where the hell we were at. The next morning we were only about 50 yards from the road. We just walked up like nothing happened. All

bit up by the bugs. We never even got a scratch.

Interviewer: You also have mentioned about a fight when a bar was torn apart.

Mr. Acuna: Well, I was on guard duty. It seemed like I was always on guard duty on holidays. It was getting to be Christmas and I was on guard duty. There were no passes to no where. Everybody was restricted to camp. During the night, here comes a bunch of soldiers from Company B. I turned my back on them. I said "to tell with it. I don't care where they go." It was nearing Christmas and they were away from home. If I hadn't of been on guard duty, I probably would have been with that bunch. But I remember some in that bunch, Sgt. Ogle (sp), and Lt. Braun, and a bunch of them.

There was a little bar just outside the post called, The Cracker Box. It was just throwed up over night with anything that was available. It had a long bar. That is all that was there. They sold rum. Sometimes no cokes, just straight rum. I heard later that Braun and his boys, when the MP's came in and tried to straighten them all out. They were trying to take them in. I think they had two truck loads of MP's, too. Jeeps and trucks. Anyway a fight started. The whole situation amounted to the jeeps were overturned, even a truck was overturned. The MP's had the hell beat out of them. Braun and them came singing down the road, just as happy as a lark.

The next morning they tried to question us. I said "no, they must have gone through the bushes, we never saw nobody." The MP's from Panama City came over to investigate the situation. Since some of their boys got beat up pretty bad. We told them that we didn't know anything. We had nothing to do with it and there was nobody from the 158th to be investigated because nobody went through the gate. So they turned back and left.

That entire episode was forgotten. But not from the boys at Company B. That is when I found out it was the boys from Company B who were in that joint. The joint was completely torn apart. They went over there, no bar no walls. Half of the roof was gone. And was supposed to be a two-story building. Half of the entire roof was leaning down on one side. Even all the rum was gone.

Nobody knew where it went. The bartender there was crazy. He said that he was going to find out because he did not receive any money for his drinks. So nonchalantly, I told him that he should have known better. Why didn't he get his money in advance. They came here to forget, evidently, they must have forgotten.

After it happened, Ogle (sp) never did forget. He used to laugh like hell about it. That was before he went to Officer's School.

There were a lot of little instances like that in the service. We were stationed at Carawina (sp) before we went to Pinchaven (sp) and the entire 158th was supposed to rendezvous at Pinchaven (sp). We didn't know at that time that we were just about ready go into battle at Sarmi-Wakde. In the meantime, while the elements of the 158th were coming in by boat and plane from other places, I had my squad there to unload boats. So I had a boy that would do anything in the world if you asked him to. His name was Brown. I think he had been in the service about 7 years and still wasn't drawing longevity. He had spent too much time in the guardhouse. So I told Brown to get me a duck. So here he comes with a duck. I don't know where he stole it, but he got it. We went way out in the ocean and traded off some guns and everything else and bought Australian money a whole two cases of Calvert Whiskey. We came back and we distributed it. I got four quarts, almost a gallon.

There I was in my tent drinking it when Braun came by and said "Hey, you got any whiskey." I said "Yeah, here's a quart." So he said that he had a date with a blonde nurse. And Colley (sp) jumps up, drunker than hell, and said "my God, he's only been here three days and he's already got a date with a beautiful blonde and here we are, we can't even take the natives out in the bushes." I said "well, go out and talk to yourself." But Braun must have had a wonderful time, because he never said any more. Every time we saw him, he had a big smile on his face. I guess that blonde must have been a wonderful girl.

Interviewer: I think she was a head nurse.

Mr. Acuna: Head Nurse. Whatever she was, she was a blonde. We hadn't seen blondes for two years.

We had 52 men in our Company. We crossed the Snaky (sp) River with just two platoons. We had the attacking platoon and the reserves. We attacked Mafin (sp) Two on a two platoon front. Just a regular frontal attack. Anyway the Japs retaliated. They pinned us down. Later we found out that they must have had over 2,000 Japs at Mafin Two on that particular day. We were attacking with 52 men. So we were pinned down. The machine gun fire and the _____fire was so terrible that it was just knocking the bark off the trees. We lost 3 men that day. Hernandez got shot; Webb got hit in the head; and some red headed kid got hit in the back.

Anyway we were bent down there and all of the sudden, Braun stands up and says "I'm hit, I'm hit" grabbing his butt. I looked up and the expression on his face could never be duplicated in 1001 years. It was so comical. Everybody burst out laughing. The war was forgotten. A bullet had gone through his canteen and all the water was flowing down the crack of his butt, and he thought he was wounded. Anyway, we finally decided we had to withdraw because we could not attack. We never forgot that episode.

The next morning, we took a reconnaissance patrol. Myself, Hedger, Simmons and Capasoni (sp) and we went on the high ground overlooking Mafin Two. We stood there for about half an hour after we reached our objective and just lay there frozen and watched. When we went in, there were a lot of dead Japs around. Japs we did not know we had killed. They must have left in a hurry. They evacuated Mafin Two because they probably thought we were going to hit them again.

There was one big tent that was half in the ground. It looked like gigantic pill box. It must have been where they had the wounded because there were a lot of surgical instruments just laying around.

Later on, when I was on Luzon, I contacted a boy from the 6th Infantry Division. He told me

that they had hit Mafin Two and the Lone Tree Hill. At that time when we went up there and there were no Japs there. They must have come back and taken that place again and fought for it because it is in the history of the 6th Infantry Division about actually the fight for Mafin Two and Lone Tree Hill.

The next time we went there, there was no Japs at all. They must have been scared as hell of Braun and Company.

Interviewer: You mentioned about the suicide attack. You mentioned that I had forgotten. I know that they came out of the jungle, but I didn't know that one of them got in front of your hole and told you not to shoot because he was mean.

Mr. Acuna: The first time we were relieved by Company L at the Snaky River. We came back for a rest. It was supposed to be a rest, but they put us guarding an engineer's water hole. So we dug in, just like you dig in every night, and paid no attention because we were supposed to be on rest duty. Anyway, that same night the Japs hit us. They come right in on us. They knew just exactly where we were. It was hand-to-hand combat. They came in screaming "don't shoot, don't shoot" this is Braun, Braun. I told the machine gunner "For God sakes, I know Braun's name, shoot, their Japs." How they found out his name, I do not know. Maybe he wrote to them.

Anyway it was a terrible night. We had hand-to-hand combat with them. We lost quite a few boys. But they did too. All night long it lasted. They hit us, I don't know how many times. That night was so dark, you couldn't see anything. They just kept coming in and leaving, leaving their dead, dragging their dead back, and coming in again. They were completely just bombed out on saki. They were all drunk, screaming. But they were screaming Braun's name and if we had paid any attention to them, they would have just walked in taken us right there. It was a good thing I recognized Braun's name. Evidently the other boys didn't. They were skeptical about me ordering to

open fire on the Japs. That was a real terrible night. They wanted a special invitation sent in by Lt. Harold Braun.

Interviewer: That was the night we put my brother-in-law to work. The poor guy was from the Signal Corp. He had never been in combat.

Mr. Acuna: That night one of Braun's relatives came to visit him down at the water hole. So Braun put him to work carrying ammunition to us. That poor guy didn't even know what the score was, there we were engaged in hand-to-hand combat with the Japs and he was right in the middle of it trying to deliver ammunition. But Braun would do anything, he could have cared less. As long as he tried to save B Company.

Interviewer: You mentioned about the time we were at the river and we had a clash with a certain lieutenant.

Mr. Acuna: We were dug in at the _____. We had crossed the _____ River. We had taken Mafin One and we were dug in right there until the next morning. We were given orders to attack. We were on our way to Sarmi _____. So I was given orders to cross a bridge and take over the bridge and take over the right flank which was a beach to give right front protection. So we hit it. _____ was my second in command. So B Company crossed the bridge, five yards apart, down a two-rut road. I was on the right flank giving right flank protection. So we got to the jetty. There was a place there call "the jetty". So I couldn't see B Company. I told Jack, "take over the Company, take over the squad and I am going to see if I can contact Capt. Cook and ask what in the hell the score is. I don't even know what in the hell is going on."

So I contacted Capt. Cook and he told me that he didn't know what was going on. Besides he had malaria. I said that somebody had to take over. So then I contacted Lt. Braun. He was next in charge. He was standing there and we squatted down. I said "what in the hell is going on. Evidently your company commander, Capt. Cook, has gone to the hospital. He is sick." This other lieutenant jumps up and says "no, I am in charge." Braun looks at him and says "the hell you are, I'm in charge. I got seniority." This other lieutenant didn't say anything else. So I told Lt. Braun that since he was in charge of B Company, things would be a lot different. I could see that already. I went down and spread the word.

And just overnight the morale of the troops went up 1000 percent. We were ready to fight the Japs. I told them "Braun is in command and may God have mercy on the Japs and their rotten souls because here we come. We're not stopping till we hit Sarmi _____." And you know it and I know and everybody else knows it." But it seemed like everybody was happy. Happy as a lark because Braun was in charge.

Interviewer: Tony, you met Sergeant Steger (sp), who was the First Sergeant of B Company. You met him at _____ Hospital shortly before he passed on and you know what we said then, that he had Lieutenants scared to death. Ramon had just told me that he had complimented me that night. He never expressed those feelings to me.

Mr. Acuna: Well, Sergeant Steger (sp) visited me. I was laying in bed there one day and somebody walks in and said "you AWOL?" I jumped up, and said "My God, Steger (sp), how are you?" So we got to reminiscing about everybody and about the war. And the first thing he told me was if I remembered Lieutenant Braun. I said, "Hell, do I remember. I'll never forget that guy." He said, "Do you remember this Captain that was always getting sick the minute we went into action?" I said that I did remember him.

He said, "Right there when he told me that Braun was in complete charge of B Company, right there, that second it I knew and everybody else knew that heard it that we were in good hands. Lieutenant Braun was in charge." And he did tell me that the first day that he came down here to visit me. He remembered everything.

Interviewer: After that fighting at Sarmi, we went on to Noemfoor. Do you remember Noemfoor with Hill 201?

Mr. Acuna: I missed that. I was in Sarmi with malaria.

Interviewer: You didn't get it from that Captain did you?

Mr. Acuna: No, I didn't get it from the Captain. In fact, Sgt. Steger (sp) was with me. I was wanting to go with Sgt. Steger (sp) to Noemfoor and he said "no that I would AWOL and I had to stay in the hospital until they gave me a release."

I got to Noemfoor and I joined when the First and Second Battalion had taken

_____. I was walking down _____

and there were no Japs there. I was down on the runway when I met Lt. Braun and there he was

laughing. He said "you know what happened to me?" And I said "What?" He said, "I had hot cakes this morning and I some of the syrup that the Japs had on the hot cakes. And I found out later when a guy read the label. It was stuff you put on paper to catch flies."

Interviewer: Tony, on June 9th is my birthday and I always thought I was going to get wounded and it happened on June 10.

At this point the tape stopped and continued with.....

Interviewer: Tony, we have switched cassettes and we got Steger's (sp) and a little bit of round robin. You are going to have to do a bit of weeding out but this is the first time that Ray and I have been together in 39 years and there is a lot of memories being brought back. Just before the Stegers (sp) arrived Ray started to tell about my belated birthday present which happened down at a jetty area. We went and had a beautiful steak dinner courtesy of Ray. And another thing, 40 years ago, Ray borrowed \$20 and when he found out I was still alive, he mailed it to me. I mailed it back to him and tonight he jammed it at me and was going to be insulted unless I took it. Now how is that for a long memory. We will get back to this action at the jetty. Ray will tell you in his own words what happened just before I did get blown off that bridge.

Mr. Acuna: I remember one morning when Lt. Braun came to me and said that he was taking out a combat patrol to the jetty. We were dug in at Mafin One at the Terafom (sp) River. He was in charge of the 3rd Platoon. We took off in a staggered formation, five yards apart. The jetty was approximately 2 miles away.

We finally got there and deployed. I deployed my squad close to the beach. Johnny Hyde (sp) had another squad. He was to the rear. Hyatt and Braun and Hedger were right there at the point. I didn't see this because the foliage was too thick but the Japs were coming. I heard some shooting and right there I knew that Braun had run into some Japs because he was the only one that had a carbine. I told Jack to stay there and I was going to go and investigate. I got to where Braun was and there was three dead Japs right next to him about five yards apart, about 10 feet away from him.

They had gunny sacks with them. So I said, "My God what is this?" I went over and picked up the gunny sacks, all three gunny sacks, looked at them and there was TNT blocks manufactured

by the Hercules Powder Company, I think, from San Francisco, California. So I took the TNT blocks and threw them in Mafin Bay which was about 50 yards away. Just in plain view of the Japs, but at that particular time I didn't even care, or didn't pay any attention to it.

We stayed there all day long. We saw a company of Japs headed our way from where our advantage was. They were coming down this two-rut road in deployed battle formation. Braun immediately ordered 4.2 mortars on them. Right pin point and that stopped the attack. They didn't make it to the jetty. We withdrew in the afternoon. Braun gave orders to go down to the beach. Everybody didn't like that because it was too exposed. They wanted to go up the two-run road. Braun nixed it and I seconded the motion. So we went 10 yards apart, or maybe a little more, toward our perimeter of defense where we were dug in at the Terafom (sp). We were split up so far. I was the last man out because my squad was given rear guard action.

When we got back to the perimeter of defense I heard that Braun had been knocked off the bridge. Had been completely blown off the bridge. We were under tremendous artillery fire. The artillery was straight up that two-rut road. We missed it. We were going up the beaches according to the orders he gave. That really saved us. When we got to the perimeter of defense, I was getting some water in my canteen and Jack _____ and Hyatt were there. And _____ told me that Braun had been blown off the bridge. I said "What happened to him for God sakes?" He said "Well, put him on an ambulance but he is not badly hurt." I said "What do you mean he is not badly hurt?" Jack said, laughing, "He was born under a lucky star. Here is a guy who takes out a combat patrol two miles into Jap infested territory. He single-handed killed 7 Japs. Gets mad at some body because they spilled 1/2 canteen of water. Comes back gets blown off a bridge right about 40 feet down below and falls on a dead Jap and just got a few scratches on him. How lucky can you get?"

I said, "Well, Jack, I guess you know what Mark Twain's mother told Mark Twain. Him who is born to hang will never drown." So later on when we went back, Braun was still in the

hospital. That is when we were waiting for reinforcements to go back to Noemfoor. We didn't know at that time that we were going to go attack Noemfoor Island. The next time I saw Braun was at Noemfoor on the apron at Nambra Air _____.

Interviewer: Tony, that was quite an experience. There was a counter-attack. I went AWOL from the hospital to rejoin the outfit. Another point, I landed on a very ripe Jap. I wasn't too badly hurt, but just hesitated going to the hospital. And when they brought it in and the medic opened the back door of the ambulance with the Red Cross on it, the doctor raised hell and said "don't bring them back when they are that ripe." He was surprised when I jumped out of the back of the ambulance. The way I smelled, he thought I had been long-gone.

The tape continues and the transcriber is not sure who is talking here: And then this other cassette that we have completed with the Steger (sp) relatives. They signed the release and they would appreciate having, and we all referred to him as The Sergeant, because he was the only First Sergeant. Steger (sp) was the original one. So we designated between this First Sergeant and that First Sergeant. And we called _____ "The Sergeant". (At this point the tape volume was down and it was very hard to hear what was being said.)

I am going to get Ray on some of these other stories about he went down on leave to Australia and get some of the other funny things that happened. When we got to the Philippines, it wasn't very much fun. We went through this bloody Sunday, remember when the Japanese had us zeroed in. Now the way Ray got wounded, I would like for him to tell you.

Mr. Acuna: From the first minute we hit the Lingayen Gulf, we were under fire. We were getting bombed and everything. Artillery was on us and we had a long stretch of beach in front of us, about three miles, before we hit the sand dunes. So we finally made it to the sand dunes that evening. Right

off the bat, I got orders from Capt. _____ to take my squad and go about three miles up to the mountain and put up an outpost.

We went down there and that was better out there than those guys at the beach because every 10 minutes here comes a 240 mm mortar that the Japs had about 10 miles away. It was roaring through there like a freight train, just hitting right almost on them. So we stayed there all that night. We could hear the Japs pulling out. The Company rejoined us the next day and from that time on, we were under artillery fire almost every day until we got relieved and took the high ground. We could see a valley for about 15 miles in front of us when we were given orders to go rest. We only stayed resting one day.

The next day, we got on trucks and were taken to a road going to Rosario. We got off the trucks and deployed in a ravine. We were still under artillery fire going up the ravine. Suddenly there was a tremendous explosion. I looked back and I said "My God that was close." I looked at my arm and that was it. It was just shattered. What had happened was that a sniper Jap shot at me and hit a hand grenade in my battle pak and one of them blowed up. The officer that was next to me was Major _____. He looked at me and said, " Well, you started giving orders for everybody to deploy and scatter." I told him, "I finally got it. I guess it was alive and finally bit me."

They took me back to the aide station. And maybe two or three days later they took me to a hospital at San Fernando. There was nothing there but a cathedral. Every building in the entire town had been demolished. I was there about three days when Johnny Hyde (sp) and Miller came over and said "Hey Ray, did you hear about Braun?" I said I hadn't heard. They said that he had been hit too and he was upstairs. I said "Almost everybody is getting hit." So I shuffled up some stairs wearing some shoes that didn't belong to me. Here was Braun happy as a lark, just sitting there eating a great big fried chicken. He already had a little Philippino girl washing his feet.

I said, "Braun, I wouldn't eat that chicken." He said, "Do you know what chickens eat here

in the Philippines?” Anyway, we left the hospital there and were taken to Hollandia. From Hollandia we were put on the USS Monterrey and came back to the States.

About two days before we got to San Francisco, I was broke. I had already lost what little money I had playing poker while crossing the ocean. I borrowed \$20 from him. I will never forget those \$20 as long as I live. Just as soon as I registered in the hospital, I asked the nurse if I could take a shower. I hadn't taken a bath since the time I got wounded. I was with a paratrooper from the 503rd, who had also been wounded. We became good buddies. We saw a guy mopping the floor. He said, "My God, he is a wino." So we got him to get us a bottle. I gave him the \$20 that Braun had loaned me. That is what I remember because right then and there it bought me a great big bottle of _____ . Every time I had a drink, I said, "this is Braun."

The next time I saw Braun, he says he was at my house, in 1946. I actually don't remember that. Two or three days later, I was sent to the hospital. I had malaria and a temperature of 106. Until now it sure surprised me when he walked in. It did my heart good just to see him and remember everything that we went through over there. And not only that the good times we actually had. We had some real good ones and some rowdy ones. Of course they always ended up with a little hangover but nevertheless you forget about things like that. You never worry about suffering from alcoholic wounds. Always just think of the good times you had the night before.

So I sure regret the fact that Braun has got to go. I wish that he could stay here tonight. I wish I was drinking, I have been a teetotaler now for the past five or six years. But if I was, I would puncture his tires and he would never, never make it to Phoenix.

Interviewer: Tony, Ray just reminded me of something else that it was pretty much a western Arizona outfit. So we did begin to notch the stock of our weapons. It got to the point that Ray told me to cut it out because I wouldn't have anymore wood left pretty soon. (*The transcriber was unable to understand what was being said.*)

I am going to try to get - I am coming very close to the end of this side because I will be turning it over, but Ray has a couple of funny stories post-war. I spoke to Ray on the telephone and he said that he had an alcoholic problem when he was drinking, he also had a job driving nitroglycerin. I would like to have Ray tell you in his own words about that. About the three Mormons who were blown away.

Mr. Acuna: I was at the Veterans' Hospital until 1950. They finally put me back together like a jigsaw puzzle. I had two operations on my arm. I got me a job at this plant where they manufacture dynamite. Of course, at that time, I became a week-end drunk. Couldn't wait for Friday to come.

I got me a job called Mix-house foreman. I mixed the nitroglycerin with the ingredients. On the average, I handled about 15,000 pounds of liquid nitroglycerin everyday. They had a terrible explosion one morning. At the Weigh house a person by the name of Anderson got blowed away. It reminded me of those great big bombs that we were getting hit by in _____
It was just about that size of explosion.

They called it the Weigh House. I worked at the Weigh House for about two months. That is where they weighed the nitroglycerin to send it to the Mix House. The Mix House was where I worked. There was two other boys that got killed on that one. So I was not a rookie when it cam to the explosions. I was a veteran with explosions. I had enough of them and even here in my civilian life, I had a few of them here. So that goes to show you that they follow you everywhere.

Interviewer: Ray tell about you were on the _____ and other fellows were on the _____. Three people who were killed were Mormons and they did not drink alcoholic liquor, they did not drink coffee, they did not smoke. But they were blown away.

Mr. Acuna: Yes. It just goes to show you that they said if you drink you are a bad boy. But these

people who were blown away, they never took a drink in their lives. They didn't drink coffee, didn't smoke. Well, they were in sainthood I imagine. But they went away, and us drunks and us smokers and poker players, Jap killers, here we are still taking a round and raising hell.

Interviewer: Tony, we are coming to the end of this. But I am looking at the wall and I see above our head our Bushmaster patch, a combat infantry bar, a silver star, a bronze star, a purple heart, and all the various ribbons from the theaters and also the Philippine Liberation medal. That is a very nice little package there. The Bushmasters earned every medal and earned it the hard way. Nothing was given to the Bushmasters.

I am going to turn this tape over because it is getting close to the end and I am going to start something else.

Side Two of Tape:

Interviewer: Ray retired when he was 58 years old. He had quite a hard time in the Army. He came home in 1945. I visited with him in 1946. He had a fever that day of about 105 degrees. When it went up a bit more, he ended up in the hospital. It took him until 1950, when they had sufficiently rebuilt the arm. What have you been doing since your retirement?

Mr. Acuna: One Friday on payday, I decided I didn't want to go back to work. So I just came home. I got together with a good friend, who is a doctor. He helped me get a little pension. For the first six months, I drew \$100 a week. Then while I was in the hospital for 30 days, I had two insurances. One paid me \$33-1/3 a month and other one \$62-2/3, so I was getting \$100 a day for 30 days. So I paid off all my debts and bought me six cases of booze and didn't go to work any more.

I stayed drunk until I just couldn't walk any more. The day I quit, I had three great bottles of

Jim Beam, 1.5 litres and two cartons of cigarettes. I was watching a football game on tv and I just left them right there. I decided no more, never again. To this day, I haven't touched a cigarette, I haven't had an alcoholic drink. My sister smoked the cigarettes. I started smoking when I was in the 8th grade. I started drinking about that time too. When they say that they have to go to clinics and see doctors to quit drinking. Just be like a Bushmaster, and decide not to do it anymore. You just make a decision and Braun seconds the motion. I know he quit smoking.

Interviewer: Tony, I quit smoking. The cigarettes were getting lousy and the other guys needed them more than me. I wasn't really hooked on it. I am glad I never went back to it.

Ray do you feel you benefited by your experiences in the Bushmasters?

Mr. Acuna: I know I did. If I hadn't been in the Bushmasters, I would have never met these wonderful people that I am around. They are nice people. I have met a lot of their relatives. It built my ego up. It has built me up to have people come to visit me.

Interviewer: Ray was ill at the time of our last reunion. He was badly missed. If he doesn't show up for the next reunion, we will move it down here to Benson.

Mr. Acuna: I'll be waiting for you. The next time I'll make it if I have to take an ambulance up there.

Interviewer: Ray, do you think our people of this country appreciate what was done for them?

Mr. Acuna: Yes, I do. I belonged to the VFW for a long time until I got too sick to get out. The people helped veterans. We used to have dinners and we helped people in need and the people

whether they came or not, they still helped out a lot. Not only that, there are a lot of people that I know of that appreciate the fact that we were over there. They knew that we were ready to lay down our lives for them. That is the way it is supposed to be from border to border.

Interviewer: What is the population of Benson?

Mr. Acuna: I don't know. We will know after the Census.

Interviewer: It is a very pleasant small town. When we walk around town here, people say "Howdy". It is quite different from the city. People are friendly. When you go into a store, and you are greeted. You can leave the car unlocked, leave the doors unlocked. It is a touch of old America.

Mr. Acuna: The door is always open here.

Interviewer: My house is your house.

Mr. Acuna: Right off the bat when we walked in to sit down and get a steak, there was a beautiful girl sitting right there and the first thing she did was ask Braun for the time of day.

Interviewer: I went out the first night in San Francisco in a stolen uniform and when I came back they had booby-trapped my bed with sixteen bedpans. All of which fell on the tile floor. I got under the bed - I thought the Japs were back. The nurse came in and Ray had come by to find out where I was and the bed was empty. The nurse said that it didn't look like anyone was there. She helped get the stolen uniform off me. She got the doctor because she thought they would have to change my cast before I went home. The condition I was in, I didn't care whether they changed the cast or not. The

next morning after breakfast, I could see what she meant, because written on the top of the cast in lipstick was “don’t forget to call me, Lucy.”

I think that will just about wind it up. I know you have got a lot to weed out on this one. But you will have to remember that Ray and I were all together in this thing. Like he said, we were mostly at the point that there was nothing out in front of us but the enemy. So we had no choice, we wanted to come home.

Mr. Acuna: One thing about it, you took care of me over there. I guess I did the same thing for you.

Interviewer: That’s right. Just like David pointed out. We were brothers. This has been a fast trip and I know I have to come back and do other recordings and other interviews. But I tell you one thing, this has really been an eye-opener even after all of the time and after having been to two reunions. There is still a feeling that I have never had before, I don’t have it from my own family, I don’t have it from any of the current friends that I have. There is a certain bond that we have. You could always trust the guy next to you whether he was an Indian or whether he was Mexican/American or whether he was some Bambino from Brooklyn. When the chips were down they were all there. It just a shame that the whole country is not like that now.

Mr. Acuna: I second that motion.

Interviewer: With that, Tony, I am going to wind up because I have to start driving back to Phoenix. Ray had me sample some rum and coke in honor of what the boys did to me down in Panama. I go heavy on the coffee. So I am going to say “adios” and I am going to wish Ray “viai con dios” and I hope we stay the best of friends. We talk to each other on the telephone quite often,

we exchange letters. I am going to sign off.

Now the tape continues with a new interviewer who was not identified.

Interviewer: Ray would you tell that one about Slade _____, please.

Mr. Acuna: Well, Slade was promoted to Corporal. He lasted one or two days as a corporal, got busted. We had a batch of jungle juice. I went out with him. I was always being to these affairs. The top of the jungle juice was about four inches thick, was nothing but bugs, butterflies, spiders, centipedes, etc. With our first two or three canteen cups we strained it through a handkerchief. But after that we just sitting there under a banana tree straining the jungle juice through our teeth, spitting out the bugs. Slade passed out. That is when he got busted. I couldn't pick him up to take him over to the tent. I was in no condition for that. He just didn't make it back to the bivouac area, he just stayed out in the jungle all night long, drinking that dirty jungle juice.

Interviewer: Ray, I just remembered something we want to get on this tape. That was Colonel _____ asked several times. I had said the same name you said. He did not know for sure who the first man in B Company to get killed was. There were two names mentioned, one had been killed and one had been wounded. *(The volume of the tape was so low the transcriber could not hear the interview even at full volume.)*

Mr. Acuna: We were making an attack toward Mafin 1. We were in the rear. I was in Henry Reed's squad. I was second in command. We were going down this road. Reed was on the left and I was on the right. He went in the woods and he hollered "I got...". That was all he said and he fell dead. This other kid that was with him, Creel (?), came out with a silly grin on his face. He just looked at us and Joe Hall was there and Harris. Harris got a couple of shots. It was Lt. Cape that killed the Jap

that killed Reed. Creel died later. I think he died on his way to the hospital.

I am the guy who took the Jap out so everybody could see the Jap. He was about 6 feet tall, well dressed had a big pack, nice pack. I didn't know what he had in his pack. He had a beautiful pair of binoculars. I don't know who got them. He was clean shaven, clean hair cut. It was Reed the first guy who got killed. Since I was second in command, I had to take over the squad.

Interviewer: We want to nail this down for any history of the Bushmasters for Company B. So the first man was Henry Reed - spelled R-e-e-d. (later spelled "Reid") (this part of the interview becomes very confusing)

(Name) _____ you have been debating the sailing from Panama. Nailing it down to January 1st, 2nd, or 3rd. Ray tells me that the Bushmasters served one year and one day in Panama before departing for Australia and the South Pacific. So that would make the sailing date from Panama, January 3rd. I am going to ask Ray whether you sailed with a convoy or not. We sailed on the Dickman (?).

Mr. Acuna: I think it was the USS White.

Interviewer: You were on the ship with me. It was the Dickman (?) Did we sail with a convoy or did we sail alone?

Mr. Acuna: We sailed alone.

(There is now discussion between several people as to whether or not they sailed with a convoy. There are more than two people at this interview. All those at the interview are not identified.)

Interviewer: Now we find we did sail alone. The convoy had departed. We sailed all the way alone. We had quite a time when we were crossing the equator.

Mr. Acuna: There were ceremonies on the ship. We were supposed to get a piece of paper certifying that we crossed the equator.

Interviewer: Did we get one?

Mr. Acuna: I threw mine away. We stopped at New Caledonia. That was a nice place. That was right next to Brisbane. I hated that place.

Interviewer: It was like New Jersey.

Mr. Acuna: It was better than Panama. There was good milk, good beer. That beer must have been 18% alcohol. I drank three bottles. I walked out of the bar and grabbed hold of a telephone pole that was right there in front of me. That was as far as I got.

Interviewer: I think the beer name was Juarez Beer.

(The discussion continues about this beer and finding it in the states. Then they continue the interview discussing and buying alcoholic beverages in Brisbane. The transcriber, fast forwarded to recollections of the Pacific war.)

At this point the tape seems to have been stopped and started in the middle of a sentence. The transcriber will continueThe person talking is not identified.

We had our still going. Also the natives showed us how to make coconut liquor by breaking the frond of a coconut palm and hanging coconuts at the end and letting it drip down. You would poke the eyes out of the coconut and put raisins in and let it ferment. We had a Mormon sergeant, the only one we could trust to keep our fermenting coconuts. He had 36 coconuts in his tent.

(The following is typed exactly the way it was told.) But what the native had neglected to tell us. He kept those eyes open. He kept poking something down through the eyes so that the fermenting raisins did not block the coconuts. We were dumb. We didn't know that. We could trust the Mormon sergeant, Sergeant Gordon, not to touch our still. Portable still. One night about 3 a.m. we thought the Japs were bombing us again. It was a chain reaction. The eyes of the coconuts had gotten blocked and had exploded. It started a chain reaction of explosions. Captain _____ never believed Gordon's story that he was innocent. He had not tasted the stuff. Do you remember how those things used to taste? We had to strain the flies out of it.

Mr. Acuna: Yes. I strained those flies. Very filthy flies. They wouldn't even leave when you waved your hand over it. You had to pick them off.

We were sitting there reading. There were a bunch of dead Japs around us. We didn't pay too much attention. We had a strong stomach.

I had some raisin bran or something like that one day. I told the Japs, I said "Hey Japs, there goes one of your raisins." It was a fly.

Interviewer: Do you remember what you did with me with the rice?

Mr. Acuna: Braun was sitting there one morning eating rice on top of pancakes. One of the Japs was there covered with maggots. I said, "Hey Braun look there one of them maggots got in your mess kit

there.” We would see it waving. It just ruined his breakfast. But how we ate right on top of them Japs, I don’t know.

Interviewer: *(Unable to understand and type what he is saying.)* It has been a long time in coming. This has been the first time since 1946 that Ray and I have been together.

(At this time the tape seems to have been stopped and started again with Mr. Acuna talking.)

Mr. Acuna:He was shaking the poncho. I got a real good bead on him. I was in a prone position. I squeezed off the trigger. That Jap. I didn’t see it but someone else was looking at him. He said “you go him, you got him.” Everybody scattered. All the Japs scattered. Must have been about 50 or 60 in plain sight.

The next day when we took the positions that the Japs had. There were about 30 or 40 Japs down in the draw dead. I was told to put a machine gun on the ridge on a spur out there. I said “there’s Japs out there. I’ll go by myself and make some noise.” So I went out there. About ten feet from me I saw the leggings of Jap, just his feet, and another Jap behind him. So I shot and there was a big explosion. This Jap had a hand grenade strapped to him. Blowed both of the Japs up.

It blinded me. Everything went white. I couldn’t see anything. They took me back and washed out my eyes for about an hour till I could finally see a little bit. And I came back. The first thing I was asked was “what are you doing?” I said I was looking for Japs. He said, “You’re crazy. I would be way back there right now in the hospital holding my eyes.” I was all right. I have to wear glasses now just on account of that. When I came back I had to wear glasses to read.

Interviewer: Anybody from the Bushmasters with service connected disability that needs proof that what they have is a result of enemy action. We want to swear to it and help them get what ever is due

them. So anybody who is in bad shape and not collecting for it...

Mr. Acuna: I don't know of anybody. Several got hit after I got hit. But I don't know how bad off they were.

Interviewer: Several of them have died.

(The interviewer and Mr. Acuna were reminiscing about former buddies and what had happened to them. The transcriber could not keep up with their jumping from name to name so this part of the tape is not transcribed.)

Interviewer: Do you remember the native dance? Remember that village outside the outpost on _____? We use to call it "Americana" or "Omaricana" something like that. Where the girls danced with the coconut oil on them and white feather? (Name) got a bunch of bananas and was high on jungle juice. He got a big bunch of bananas. The only place he could carry them was in the front of his fatigues. Do you remember those trails going down to the outpost?

That night we had another big Japanese air attack. The shrapnel came through there. And Miller was drunk, dove head first on into the dirt and is smashed all of the coconuts. And the shrapnel came right close to it. *(The person talking moved away from the microphone and the transcriber was unable to pick up several sentences.)*

.....He was telling us to write to his mother. The whole deathbed scene. He said that his whole chest was caved in. It was mashed bananas. We took his hand and pushed it into the bananas and shoved it up his nose. He sat up and went back to the outpost.

Mr. Acuna: Do you happen to remember a kid? Real nice looking kid? Little blonde by the name of Whitman?

Interviewer: Yes. He is still alive. He hasn't got any hair. Whitman didn't go to the reunion because everybody use to kid him about his beautiful blonde curly hair. Now he doesn't have any.

Mr. Acuna: He joined B Company in Panama. He never left the camp. Never went to town. Never touched a Panamanian girl or nothing. He was like a little boy. He never took a drink, never smoked a cigarette.

At Tirawina, I was going through the village and there he was drunk as hell on jungle juice, hugging and kissing one of the native girls. He wanted to find out what it was like.

Him and DeCoco had a girl. You had to be drunk to grab them natives. We did not know how they could kiss those girls. They said that the girls didn't look too bad to them. I decided they weren't looking too bad to me either. The girls wouldn't have anything to do with me. They wanted a blonde with curly hair.

(The interviewer and Mr. Acuna were exchanging names and talking about the native girls at the same time and the transcriber could not get the conversation on paper. The transcriber also felt that their encounters with the village girls could remain on the tape.)

Mr. Acuna: I was in charge of an outpost on another island. The very first day we were there, we lost radio connection. I said "what the hell, no outpost." In the daytime one guy and a machine gun and that was all. So everybody had everything to do. Right off the bat, (unknown name) made a batch of jungle juice. Nobody had nothing to do. At the village there was a real good looking native girl. We called her the roadrunner. She charged a package of cigarettes. *(The transcriber left the rest of the story on the tape.)*

Interviewer: Do you remember Lt. Pointer?

Mr. Acuna: Yes, I remember Lt. Pointer.

Interviewer: When I was living in Germany I was invited to a military party. Some guy made a crack about a civilian. I was talking and said that I had been in the Pacific. I was asked what outfit and I told them I was in the Bushmasters. One guy turned to another and said “don’t even talk to him because he has done things and been places that you will never ever get to.” Don’t make fun of this man, he has been there. He said, by the way, my aide is Major Pointer and he was in the Bushmaster. He didn’t know that he was in B Company. I asked where Pointer was. He was home baby-sitting four children. His wife was in the hospital having their fifth child. I asked for his telephone number.

We played a trick on Pointer. With his own Colonel standing by I called him. I hadn’t seen him in a long time. I called him. He answered with “Major Pointer residence.” I said, “You Lt. Pointer?” He said, “No this is Major Pointer. Who is this?” I asked him if at one time he was Lt. Pointer. He said that a long time ago he was and asked again “who is this?” I said “this is your papa-in-law from Kiarina, you make me proud grandfather. You owe me 2,000 packs of cigarettes.” He was shaken up and said “this has got to be somebody from my deep dark past.” The Colonel picked up the phone and told him that it was one of his buddies who knew him when.

(The conversation once again turned to encounters with the native girls and the transcriber left the details on the tape. They also talked about the condition of the island as a resort today.)

Interviewer: Before we left the island the natives brought us gifts. They were nice natives. We could fish. We felt we were at home.

Mr. Acuna: We didn’t have to go home. We were home.

There was a guy by the name of Braun. I think he had been in the army about six or seven years. I told him to get me a duck. It wasn't fifteen minutes later, here comes Braun driving a duck. I got in it and away we went out in the ocean. That duck was a 2-1/2 ton amphibious vehicle. So we came to a boat and by sign language we asked if they had anything to sell, like booze. They came out with two cases of Calvert. We paid a small fortune for it. We went back and split the whiskey and got drunk. The next evening, I was in my tent and the mud was about four inches deep. Everybody was talking about trying to go home and what they would do when they got home. I told them that all I wanted was ______. I didn't care what kind of ______, just as long as it is dry. I want a bed that is not wet. And I want to change clothes every day. If I could ever afford it, I would like to have a rug on the floor as thick as this damn mud. I said that I didn't care about cars about nothing else. About that time here comes Braun looking for me. He wanted to know if I had any booze. I said I had a quart. He had a date with a nurse. One of the guys looked up at him half drunk and said "look at him, look at him. He is already going out to lay a blonde. I can't even get hold of a native girl."

I said "you know Braun, he will do anything." He said "how about you? You get whiskey. I get nobody else has got a bottle, only you." I said "well, that's the way the cookie crumbles."

We left and the next day there was no more booze left, just hang overs. I was looking for Moon. You could always rely on Moonie. He always had a still.

Interviewer: Those days are long gone. But they were good days.

Mr. Acuna: There were good days and there were bad days. It is just like civilian life. There are good days and there are bad days.

I am like Sgt. ______. I took care of my mother until she died. Now that I look

back when I was working. I say, “Who in the hell would have taken care of her, if it hadn’t been for me? Maybe the maker upstairs saved my life just to do that.” Nobody else in the family could have ever taken care of my mother. I supported her till the day she died.

(The conversation continued with acquaintances they know who have helped elderly parents.)

You can’t forget anybody in B Company that I know of because we function as a cohesive unit. Everybody seemed to think alike. You didn’t have to order anybody to do anything. They were ready to help. I see a lot of soldiers now. They are going to camp carrying their lunch. Hell, we were carrying our rifles.

Interviewer: And we stole our lunches.

Mr. Acuna: Went without lunch.

Interviewer: Every unloading detail on the ship used to shake us down before they would let us off.

Mr. Acuna: I guess I was very unlucky at times. I took out a detail and played poker all night long. It was about 4 in the morning when _____ got a phone call from headquarters saying to have a detail ready to go unload boats. I had stayed up all night. So I said that I would go. He said “but you have been up all night”. I felt it didn’t really make any difference. We went to unload this boat and it was nothing but cases of peaches and pears. So we loaded up the truck and I’ll be damned if the truck didn’t break down. There we left headquarters company with all those goodies. We just had to leave them there. That is the kind of luck I had sometimes. We had enough peaches and pears to last six months, I guess.

Interviewer: That is when Moonie's moon juice had a fruit flavor.

Mr. Acuna: Things like that happened. So I thought maybe we would get to go on another detail like that again, since we had experience.

Interviewer: Were you on the one when they stole a side of beef off the ship?

Mr. Acuna: No, but I heard about it. I never did get in on that beef.

Interviewer: Well, we ate it right away. One guy pretended he had a broken leg and we pushed all of the Merchant Marine people away. We covered the side of beef with a blanket, put it on a stretcher and got off the ship with it.

Mr. Acuna: Over there, I don't ever remember in Panama, it wasn't until I got to Australia on a furlough that I had a steak.

Interviewer: There was that good Australian milk.

Mr. Acuna: They were cheap, too. One time we were in a small town and we figured out how much steak was in American money, 16 cents. Steak and eggs for breakfast. Australia was really nice.

Interviewer: But when you got that barrel of beer and started that farewell party. They were going to put me in jail for that. We spent the Company fund.

Mr. Acuna: You became a blood brother. A Pima?

Interviewer: I found out I was a Navajo. They called me White Eagle. (The interviewer continues talking about being a blood brother. He gave several Indian names. The volume at this point was low and the transcriber could not understand some of the narrative or spell the names.)

Mr. Acuna: When they initiated you, I thought they were going to kill you.

Interviewer: That is what I thought too. I saw them coming up with feathers in their hair and chicken blood on their faces and a knife in their hand and I couldn't run. I had my back up against a tree. That was a party to end all parties.

Mr. Acuna: That was a good one. Everybody drank themselves into oblivion.

Interviewer: And you told the story about Lt. Boyd and the poncho. We had a little fire because it was cold in Australia. We were drinking cold beer. Lt. Boyd and Lt. Webb came over and said "well, it is a long time between drinks, isn't it?" We said, "join us, for God's sakes." So after a while they got drunk with us, and Boyd got a little bit too drunk and he fell in the fire. All he had on was a poncho on top - it was a little cold. It didn't burn. But it steamed. We thought he was on fire with that steam coming off the poncho. We were so drunk that we could hardly pick him up off the fire. He put a little bit of the fire out. Finally we rolled him over. Everybody drunk.

Interviewer: He said later that when that one hot coal burned through the poncho. He got up and moved.

Mr. Acuna: He jumped up like a jack-in-the-box.

At this point the second side of the tape was used.

Typed by:

Becky Lindig
Nimitz Volunteer
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