

The National Museum of the Pacific War
(Admiral Nimitz Museum)

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. Herman Nitzr

October 22, 2000

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(Navy Medical Corpsman – World War II)**

I'm Don Sumner. Today is Sunday, October 22, 2000. I am interviewing Mr. Herman Bill Nitzr of Kerrville. The interview is taking place on Legacy Weekend here at the National Museum of the Pacific War in the George Bush Gallery.

Mr. Sumner: This is Herman Bill Nitzr, he was a Pharmacist Mate in the Navy and actually spent most or all of his time as a Corpsman with the 1st Marine Division. So we will ask Herman to get started with his story. Start out with your initial training and where you started in the Navy, etc.

Mr. Nitzr: My initial training was at the United States Naval Station in San Diego, California. It was regular boot camp training and also first aid training because we were being trained to serve with the Marines in the front lines on Guadalcanal, or wherever they would ship us to. After a little bit of training out in the field giving first aid, going through dummy runs, this and that, we were loaded aboard the USS Trion, which was a hospital ship, and we shipped out to Guadalcanal. I do remember the first part of the training at US Naval Hospital there. At that time we didn't have much of anything to train with and because it was early in the war, we used

dummy rifles. It was kind of a hurry up process to get us to the front as fast as they could. That was the thing that the Navy and Marines were crying for out there in the Pacific. They needed more manpower. I had had some college training in biology, etc., so I was picked to become a Hospital Corpsman. They gave me a rating and I had a little bit of hospital training in San Diego before we shipped out. Just enough to know what it would be like and that was about it. We went to Guadalcanal as the first wave of reinforcements. The initial group landed on August 7th. We landed there sometime in October. We didn't even get off the ship and here came the Japanese Zeroes. We were trying to unload, and you have your priorities for unloading. First the men, then the ammunition and supplies that go with it, and then the stuff that is needed for the wounded, and then the food. That came at the tail end. You are supposed to have enough reserve fat on you to keep you going for a few days, or weeks, which we found out was the truth. When we left there a couple of months later we were almost skin and bones. I don't know how we had enough energy to climb up those long cargo nets, but I do remember this, going on the beach there at Guadalcanal – the very day that we got there the Japanese Zeroes came in and two or three minutes later a big Naval battle started taking place off of Guadalcanal. That Japanese were coming in there, shiploads full of troops, and they were going to

recapture the airport and unload new reinforcements there on that island. I don't know how many ships were coming down, but it was a huge number. That little Air Force we had there on Guadalcanal, I think they call that the Cactus Air Force. We were stationed right next to that field there in the event the Japs tried to recapture it. Two or three nights after we got there, I don't remember the exact date, Tokyo Rose would get on the radio, we could hear her on the field radios out there, shortwave, and she would broadcast to the island telling us that we ought to surrender. They dropped all of this stuff on us, leaflets, occupational money that we were supposed to use, etc., but if we didn't surrender it would be too bad for us. They wanted us to surrender. They were really playing on our emotions and sympathy out there to surrender. We decided that was no good. No one wanted to surrender to the Japanese. There were two or three nights in a row that they shelled us. I think we lost eleven ships in two or three nights right off of Guadalcanal. The reason being, the ships got mixed up on their signals out there and they didn't know who they were firing at. We actually fired on some of our own ships. Years later there was a book that came out, or perhaps it was a movie, called "The Graveyard of Guadalcanal."

Mr. Sumner:

Iron Bottom Sound.

Mr. Nitzr:

Yes. It was also during this time that President Kennedy was out there on a PT Boat. That kept on for some time. They would fly over us at night with “Washing Machine Charley” just to keep us awake. It was more aggravating than anything else. The food never did get to that island the way it was supposed to. Like I mentioned previously, after we had been there a few months we were down to skin and bones. We were hungry all of the time. Coconuts didn’t quite fill the bill out there. You get tired of those things. There was just an awful lot of diarrhea that developed from drinking all this coconut juice and bad sanitary conditions out in the field. There was also the business of the mosquito out there transmitting malaria to the troops. The night of those sea battles out there the casualties were extremely heavy in the Navy, very, very heavy. I remember going down to the beach and helping out with some of the casualties. We were trying to get them back to the base hospital. I can still very vividly remember those guys were soaked with oil. These sailors had been blown off their ships, jumped overboard, etc. They were soaked with oil. Even their faces were black from the oil. The uniforms, or whatever they had on, were soaked with oil. The ones that could wiggle a little bit, we would try to give them priority in taking them back from the beach to the hospital. You almost had to sort them out because the guys that they brought in from the Higgins Boats out in the Bay and that

they had picked up, they had them stacked like cord wood, one next to the other on the beach there. I don't know how many men we lost there in that sea battle, but our casualties were heavy. I don't know if Uncle Sam ever gave a full report of how many we lost there in Guadalcanal in those sea battles, or not.

Mr. Sumner: I think they have broken it down by ships. I believe there are totals for the Guadalcanal campaign, but not by day. Yes, they were heavy. The Japanese long lance torpedoes was a very effective weapon.

Mr. Nitzr: These guys looked very pitiful being oil soaked. The Cactus Air Force helped to stop the Japanese replacements from coming in. I don't know how many of their ships we sunk. Those were some brave guys that went out there to sink those ships. Their reinforcements were coming in from Rabaul. That was a hub of operations in the southwest Pacific. Near the end of the year, I think it was near the end of December, they relieved the 1st Marine Division. The Army came in and took over. Then we got to spend about eight months in Australia, first in Brisbane, and then in Melbourne. From there they shipped us up New Guinea to Milam Bay, where we stayed for three months in the heat along the Equator there. We took a lot of jungle training, jungle hikes, and jungle conditioning getting ready for further combat. I think it was in 1943, near the end of '43 or beginning of '44, they decided that we

needed to take an airstrip on a place called Cape Gloucester, New Britain. It was necessary that we take this. At one end of it was the air strip and on the other end of it was a Rabaul, where the Japanese reportedly had about 250,000 troops at one time. That is the figure I read once. It was really a big hub of operation. What we were supposed to do was capture the air strip and then advance on down to Rabaul, which was about 150-200 miles further up the coast. The Navy had shelled the air strip for several hours it looked like a plowed field. The B-29 bombers came in there and dropped more bombs on it. Going into the beach wasn't so bad, but the Japs retreated away from that. They went back, inland into the brush. I know when we hit that beach, we waded ashore in the water, and all along the beach there was nothing but bomb craters, shell holes, etc. We thought it was pretty good, but the first wave went in, then the second wave and they secured a beach head, perhaps 100-200 yards inland, and that was it. Now, the first wave that went in, they secured the beach. The next wave that came through, you are supposed to go through that first wave that went in and find the enemy back in the brush there.

Mr. Sumner:

Let me interject here – Herman is referencing the cover of the book, “The Campaign on New Britain.”

Mr. Nitzr:

The Japs just took off and hid in the hills in the jungle there. I happened to be detached with a rifle company then. When you are with a rifle company on the very front lines, you catch the brunt of whatever is out there, especially in the jungle when you can't see them. There was no way you could see them. They are tying themselves up in the tree. There were a lot of snipers. Not only that, but they had a way of digging down in the ground, their own style of foxholes. They would wait for you to come along. They loved to ambush you. For about two weeks we were chasing them in the jungles and we were trying to find where their main body of troops was located. Finally they were located in a place called Agoura Ridge. They kept retreating in front of us, but they got on top of a ridge, a high place there, and they could look down on us, but we couldn't see them. The orders were to keep moving forward, which we did. If they didn't get on a high ridge, they

would dig under these huge trees in the jungle. They dug like rats in there and there was no way you could get them out of there by bombing them, or by shelling them. The shells and bombs would hit the tree tops while they would be dug in below these big trees. They would laugh at you until you got close to them. I recall a place there on New Britain called Suicide Creek. The orders came from Colonel McDougal to move forward. It was pointless to try to move forward because every time you tried to move forward you would get more men killed or wounded. Me being a Corpsman, when the guys were wounded out in front of the front lines (we always had scouts that went ahead), the Corpsman had to get out there. The Marines would say for the Corpsman to get out there, we'll keep you covered. That was pretty hazardous duty. You had to go out there after them. Also, you got sniped at and shot at while you were out there. They couldn't see who was shooting at me, and they couldn't see who was doing the shooting. The scouts were out there and they got hit and we were supposed to try to get them back, give them first aid, try to get them back. One guy was hit bad. Another guy and myself went out there to get him. There was a sniper out there in a tree, I guess maybe 200 feet from us. He started peppering us and we finally located a tree. I got my carbine that I had with me and I got so excited, instead of pushing the safety release I pushed my clip release and the clip fell to the ground. The

guys are behind us yelling “Up in the tree.” We signaled to them that we had spotted them up there. It wasn’t long when a BAR man and a machine gun man peppered that sniper up in that tree and that was the end of him. We finally got the guy out of there. It was so sad about these guys getting so shot up in the front. There was this one guy out there, he had been hit by the Japanese machine guns, and he was really shot up. He had been hit several times. I got out there to give him first aid, put the bandages on him, and give him a shot of whiskey. That is supposed to be a stimulant. Finally, he was hurt and really hurting bad because the morphine had not taken effect. He said, “Well Doc, just shoot me.” I wasn’t going to do that. I said, “Listen, we are going to get you back there. You will get good help when you get further back.” We never did go across that creek. We were trying to get to the other side. The Japs were imbedded on the other side. We never did get across that creek that day. Finally, the Colonel that was always telling us to go forward, he got shot in the back. Finally they wanted to know what we needed to get across that creek. We said, “We need a tank, or something that can blast some of that foliage out in the jungle, and also that will go in after the Japs underneath those trees.” They could see us, but we couldn’t see them. They could see us advancing and that is when the casualties occurred. Later on some tanks did come up there. There were two of them. We finally got

them to the front. They were these amphibious tractors that moved up to the front lines. They fired point-blank into those trees and scared the Japs out of there, but that wasn't the end of it. They kept retreating back, retreating back; they had a common staging ground somewhere in the back where they were going to put up the final battle for that end of the island. It seemed like we did a lot of patrolling out there. Patrolling in the jungle with a squad or platoon of men is really hazardous because you never know what you are going to run into. Another fellow corpsman with me in this platoon, he was a former boxer. We were going on this trail trying to find out where the Japs were, single file, we spread out maybe five yards apart. We couldn't bunch up too close – that was bad. We heard a lot of “yapping” over to one side. I will never forget that. I don't know if it was the platoon Sergeant, or who it was, said “Who's over there? We're Marines.” All of a sudden they opened up on us. They were Japanese out there camouflaged. We had this one guy, he got hit. He had been hit on Guadalcanal, and he got hit again. He cracked up right then and there. Instead of giving him one shot of morphine, we gave him two. That settled him down. You know, going through the jungle like that single file, when you are ambushed some should fall to the right and some to the left to get down in a hurry and see where the fire is coming from. To holler was just to give away our position. So this guy

that we gave two shots of morphine, he wouldn't quieten down, so we just knocked him out cold. Then after we returned fire to that area, we didn't know how many Japs were over there, it died down so I guess they took off again. They played very much a harassing game with us in the jungle because we couldn't see them and they would always be on the lookout for us coming in. Maybe two days later, we found where their ridge was, where they had gathered to make a last stand. We started slowly advancing up that slope, but they were always retreating in front of us and going back. We found out later that they had their foxholes and everything else on top of that ridge. We were advancing along as a company, trying to find out where the main body of the troops was. We wanted to engage them there. Every time we would advance it would be more men getting hit. I know our company "K" Company and "L" Company took the brunt of this campaign. Captain Halldane, the Company Captain, he was a great guy, I really liked him. I remember being by his command post and we were getting shot all over, and we couldn't see them. He said he was going to stop advancing his troops. He said, "You can relieve me of my command right here." I was right there by him when he said that. He said, "I'm not losing another man trying to advance. We can't see them. We don't know what's up there. Relieve me of my command right now." I guess he was talking to Colonel Walt, back

behind the lines somewhere. The ridge was named after him later. He says, "What do you need?" He said, "We need something that will blast that foliage out of the way. We need heavier equipment other than just rifles and BAR men, to get up the slope." It was Colonel Walt. He was the one that got the one tank to come up there. It was a tank that was dragging a 37mm field piece. When the tank couldn't go any further because of the trees, etc., the men pushed that 37mm field piece out in front. Colonel Walt even put his own shoulder to the wheel. The guys got hit moving it to the front. They started blasting away in the jungle, and finally the Japs took off, but they didn't take off very far. They went to the top of the ridge. That is where they really dug in. It was beginning to get dark. Then, they went just to the other side of the ridge. On this side of the ridge there were some foxholes that they had dug in to earlier. Everyone knew that the Japs were going to counter-attack. They were good at counter-attacking at night. They were really loaded behind that ridge. That is where their main body of troops was. We went as far up that slope as we could. Finally, by blasting them with that 37mm and advancing, hitting more men with it. We finally got to the top of that ridge, but they retreated to the other side of the ridge. It was getting dark and we knew what was going to happen. They were going to counter-attack that night because they were fanatics and we knew that. We had a password

with us at the front. That particular night it was “Filipino.” If anybody was going to move around in the dark he had better know that password and holler it out, or you would get shot. That night up there in the front line, it got pretty rough. We were tired from two solid weeks of being in the front line. We had not eaten; didn’t get any decent sleep. We were in the soaking rain of New Britain. It was during the season of the monsoon rain and it was just about as bad as anything could be. We got there and our eyes were bloodshot and we were just about as malnourished as being in that wet, damp, jungle area. No food, no decent water. Some of the water that we got out of the creeks, there were dead bodies in the creeks. We were completely exhausted. I don’t know what even gave us the strength to move ahead. We didn’t know whether we could hold out against those Japs any longer. They told us, “Don’t fire on them when you see one out there because you will be giving your position away. Instead, pull the pin on a hand grenade and throw it over there and they won’t know where it came from.” The lines were as much as ten and twenty yards apart. The Japs were also throwing hand grenades at us. The first attack came in the morning. By that time, behind us the artillery and the mortars were there and we had that 37mm field-piece on the front line. We had our lines stretched out there with the BAR men and the regular rifles. I was by that 37mm field-piece. We knew that the Japs

wanted that. We knew that is where the hell was going to break lose. I was right by that, lying flat on the ground. We were in a large jungle area where the trees were high. We knew they were coming because they kept yelling back at us, "Oh you die, oh you die." They hated our Marines. They could cuss us pretty good. It was maybe 12 o'clock or one o'clock, it was pitch dark in that jungle. You couldn't see anything. There was no moonlight, nothing like that to go by, you couldn't fire up a cigarette or anything. It was just dark. But we could hear them on the other side of that ridge. As I said, the word was passed that you use the word "Filipino" if you did any movement, and don't fire until they are ready to charge and then let them have it. We knew they would be coming with one of their Banzai attacks where there would be one behind the other. Sure enough, about one o'clock all hell broke loose. I don't know whether they were high on saki, or what it was, but here they started screaming and hollering; running toward the lines. They had their swords. I guess the artillery was fairly well zeroed in on them. Suddenly that whole jungle just lit up with fire from the firepower that we had on the front lines and the fire that the Japs were throwing at us. Shells were exploding out in front of us. I don't recall how long it lasted, but about all you could do is hear the screams and cries of those guys that were being hit and killed. Our artillery shells are not always too accurate. They fell short.

One fell short right in our line. There was a guy very close to me and some of that artillery shell hit him. I tried to give him first aid and he didn't say anything. I did give him a shot of morphine. All of the guys around there were screaming "Corpsman, Corpsman." That is what they called us. I'd go from one to the other, trying to give them first aid. I was yelling "Filipino, Filipino." I was yelling that while I was crawling along trying to get to them. I got to that one foxhole because the guy had been hit; someone had shot him in the butt. He said it was a good thing I was saying Filipino because he had the rifle aimed right at me. You could hear people moaning and dying all around, but you couldn't see them. Then everything died down for a while; it was quiet. I don't know whether the reinforcements got up there or not. One guy said, "It was just like shooting rats coming out of a hole." They didn't know where they were going either. They were running up there blind. That wasn't all of it though because in a while, here they came again. They had regrouped. I don't know what hour of the morning it was. When they came the second time it wasn't as strong as that first charge. When that one artillery shell fell short and I was trying to take care of the guy right next to me, I don't know what happened – whether I was knocked out for a little while or what happened. The second group came and I thought to myself, "What in the world." The ammunition was running low.

They had carriers coming up to the front and I don't know whether they sent fresh troops up to the front of our line or not. It started getting daylight, just enough light out there in the jungle to see what was happening. All I could see from the place where I was that 37mm field piece. Out in front of the line nothing but dead bodies stacked up out there. In our section of the line there was nothing but dead fellows and guys that we had tried to evacuate and get back behind the line. When daylight came another company moved up to relieve us. That is one time I cried, prayed – did everything that night because I didn't think my life was worth a nickle. They pulled us off the front line and after having been on the front line that many days, I think the report finally got back that there were 60 of us that came off of a company of about 250-275 that started. It was still rainy and no food up there. They put these replacements with us and they had nice looking uniforms compared to what we had because they had just came off a ship. We were glad to see those fresh replacements come in. No sooner had they filled the ranks up again, then they said we were going to stay there a few days to rest up, and it was just a few days. They had filled up our ranks to the normal number of men. They said we were going to go toward Rabaul. That was our target. We patrolled for about three months going along the coast down to Rabaul. That wasn't so hot either.. Sometimes we would be aboard a Higgins boat going a few

miles; other times we'd have to walk along the coastline. We were still trying to find out where those Japs were. We took a few prisoners; very few. We had a canine dog with us. Our prisoners had been cut off from their main troops too. Finally the word came down that "we need some prisoners." We weren't taking any prisoners. We sent those ragged guys back. They were beat up and suffering from malaria, etc. We got to Talasea. There was a little bit of a skirmish there; not much. It was nothing like we had up there on Walt Ridge when we had those counterattacks. I was relieved. The word came from General MacArthur that there was no need to take Rabaul, we could stop at Talasea. We were happy. That was the main fortification in the Southwest Pacific.

Mr. Sumner: Rabaul.

Mr. Nitzr: That was the hub of their operation. That is when I and some other Corpsmen were relieved, and also some of the Marines that had been on Guadalcanal. Fresh troops came in. When I got back to the Base Hospital I ran into a Corpsman that slept next to me in Field Training at San Diego, California. He asked me, "Who in the hell are you?" I asked him if he remembered me and he said that I looked like something the "cats drug in." I guess I had gone down to 135-140 from 180 pounds. I told him it was pretty rough out there and we didn't get much to eat. Those guys back in the base hospital looked pretty good. We got sent back to Pavuvu (?)

and then we came back to the States.

Mr. Sumner: Where was that?

Mr. Nitzr: That is in the Russell Islands. That was a restaging area for the 1st Marine Division. From there I came back to the States, San Francisco is where I disembarked. They checked us out and then I came home. I don't know how many attacks of Malaria I really had in the Pacific.

Mr. Sumner: What year was that when you finally got back?

Mr. Nitzr: It was 1944 when I got back.

Mr. Sumner: So you had been out there from '42 to '44?

Mr. Nitzr: We had been over there 20 months. They sent us home for rest & rehabilitation. I went to the Naval Hospital at Corpus Christi. Six months to the date they sent us back to the west coast for further transfer, which meant that Japan had not surrendered. We were training at San Bruno, California. We were told that we were going to hit the mainland of Japan and that it was going to be hard. Fortunately, President Truman called for dropping the Atomic bomb and that stopped it. I think if we had gone in to invade the Japanese homeland I wouldn't be here today. At Sasebo, Japan, just outside of Nagasaki, they had tunnels for submarine refueling and repair. They had pill boxes on every corner on that base. They were ready to do a lot of street fighting if we got in there. They had cannons camouflaged where they could

recess them back in the hills and they were on railroad tracks. They were prepared to defend their homeland to the last man. I stayed there a couple of months and then I came back to the States and was discharged.

Mr. Sumner: You were in Southern Japan for the occupation?

Mr. Nitzr: Yes. I was 21 when the war came along and I was 25 when I got out. I'm going to be 80 this month. I never thought I would reach 80.

Mr. Sumner: You've earned every year of it.

Mr. Nitzr: It was real hell. I was very fortunate to come back and finish schooling. I had two more years of college work. I found a very nice young lady who was training to be a nurse for the Navy. She was in Kerrville, Texas, where I am today. We married, had one daughter. We were married for 35 years. She passed away 16 years ago. But I've had a good life since I got out of it. I wouldn't want to do it again.

Mr. Sumner: Did you go back to school in Kerrville?

Mr. Nitzr: I went back to school at the University of Houston, North Texas State, and finished up there. I started out at Texas Lutheran College in Seguin when it was a two-year college. I was teaching school when the war came along. I was in a little Mexican school outside of New Braunfels. The war came along and you had to register for the draft. The day school was out you had to report for

induction.

Mr. Sumner: You said that you came back to the hospital at San Diego and one of your roommates saw you and didn't recognize you.

Mr. Nitzr: No, it was at the base there on New Britain by the air strip. We had patrolled about a hundred miles away from that air strip on New Britain. They had established a base hospital back there by the airfield. He was the guy that told me I looked like something that the cats drug up. He said that I looked like hell.

Mr. Sumner: Did you run into other people that you had initially gone through training with?

Mr. Nitzr: Just a few, but when we got aboard ship to go back to the States. They took us to Pavuvu first, the 1st Marine Division Bivouac.

Mr. Sumner: That is on the Russell Islands?

Mr. Nitzr: Yes. That was one of the worst places in the world that they could have taken us to for rest and rehabilitation. I think the Marine Corps General flew over the island and saw the pretty coconut trees out there, but when we actually landed on that island there was nothing but old coconuts that were decaying on the ground. There were torrential rains at first, all kinds of land crabs and rats, etc. on that island, and still no food.

Mr. Sumner: Had that base been an Army facility?

Mr. Nitzr: Later it was pretty good. But it was so depressing on that

island that many guys just committed suicide there because they knew they were going to be sent back into combat again if they didn't get to go to the States. My older brother, who was an officer in the Marines, came out there as a replacement when we were on Pavuvu. The same ship he came out on I left on. But when he disembarked there at Pavuvu, there were all of those young fellows looking like they were ready to go and fight, gun-ho. They were lined up on one side, on one end of the ship, and we were at the other end of the ship, a bunch of ragged looking guys. All of us looked pale and gaunt, starry-eyed, etc. A lot of them didn't care whether they lived or died. They had given us so much Atabrine and Quinine on those islands. Atabrine and Quinine has a way of being somewhat of a depressant. It is used against Malaria. You still get it though if you get enough mosquito bites, which we got plenty of. I remember coming back to the States and I was yellow and pale looking; yellow eyeballs, etc. I guess it was a good thing that my brother and I missed each other. He was on one side and I was on the other side. I was going back and he was coming in.

Mr. Sumner: So you didn't see him?

Mr. Nitzr: We just barely missed each other. He told me not too long ago that he guessed it was a good thing that he didn't see me on that island. Those guys took one look at us and wondered what kind of Asiatic specimens we were out there. It was just a horrible,

horrible time out there in those islands, especially at the beginning of the war. Later on it got better. I guess the guys got decent rations. At the first part of the war, the rations were not there and the fact that it was just the beginning, not anywhere near the end, that was hard on us – knowing that we were going to be recycled all of the time. They sent you back to the States for rest and rehabilitation. They would fatten us up and then send us back. That wasn't much to look forward to. It was very depressing wondering if the war was ever going to end. I can remember going back to Marion, Texas, where my folks lived at that time. I was single. One guy made this remark the first Sunday I was in church, "Herman, we could have grabbed you by the seat of the pants and there would have been nothing there." That is the way it was. If you had Malaria really bad, your fever goes up to 105-106 and you become delirious, you don't know what is happening. I was home on leave and I came down with a very severe attack of Malaria because I was tired of taking that Atabrine. They had to rush me to Randolph Field. I was having very bad chills. I had gone out of my head there at the house at home. I guess I was shooting Japs or something and wanted to crawl under the bed. It really shook my folks up. They got me to Randolph Field and put me in a special ward. They had not seen many cases of active malaria. I was lying in the bed shaking and perspiring. That bedspread was wet.

One older doctor there, he was trying to tell them about the different stages that I was going through – teeth chattering, shaking, sweating, high fever, etc. You couldn't get warm. You think you are cold, but really you are burning up with fever. He was explaining to these young interns around there what was happening to me. I was a pretty good guinea pig.

Mr. Sumner: You said when you were on Guadalcanal, then when they pulled you out of there and sent you down to Australia for training; how was that training compared to anything you had before? Was it more realistic or more intense?

Mr. Nitzr: In Australia they put us on these long hikes with a full pack. They wanted to see if we were getting back in shape for combat. They let us rest a couple of months before they put us back in training. Me being a Corpsman having to follow the tail-end of a company, guys would get blisters on their feet. Actually when we got off of Guadalcanal everybody had ulcers that wouldn't heal, fungus in their ears, and it was terrible. It was damp and there was no decent food and your body just doesn't repair itself. That is why they sent us back to these rest areas. In Australia they did feed us good. We had steaks, eggs, plenty of milk, but we knew what it was for. The natives were very friendly to us. At the beginning, England had called a lot of volunteers to go and fight in Africa. They got a lot of their troops from Australia, so there was a shortage

of men in Australia at that time. The men got off of Guadalcanal and went to Australia, it would be nothing unusual to see a Marine in uniform pushing a baby buggy and a young woman walking alongside him. Being in the Medical Department, it was so funny, these guys would come back into Melbourne, Australia, and they had been in fights with some of the Aussies because the men were mingling with their wives. They would come in there with broken fingers, or black eyes. I always told them not to explain it because I knew what happened. I don't know if you have heard of the Rats of Trobrook, the ones that were in Africa. They sent a whole shipload of those men back to Melbourne, their home base, that were in North Africa fighting. They hit the streets over there and saw all of those Marines out there. Until they got back, things were pretty good. But when they got back, the fights broke out everywhere. Finally it got so bad they would not give us any more leaves out there in the "boonies" where we were stationed. Then the ship left for New Guinea.

Mr. Sumner: Do you have any thoughts now that it is all in your background, in your past, what it did for you, or against you?

Mr. Nitzr: I wouldn't want to do it over again. I don't want any further experiences like that. I still have flashbacks almost every day. I don't know why it is. I guess in World War I they called it gunshot, or shell shock. Here in World War II we knew how to treat these

guys better with neuroses, but just like my brother says – he still has flashbacks almost every day where he was in combat. You learn to live with these things. Right after the war I did have some pretty bad nightmares where you jump up screaming in the middle of the night, etc. That was to be expected. When you are used to being bombed and shelled it is just something. Even today, if I hear a loud noise I almost want to fall right down on the ground. If it is something that is exploding I don't want it to hit me. That is all part of a flashback experience. They can call it what they want to. I just call them flashbacks. They get further and further apart, but almost every day that goes by you think about the guys that didn't make it back and guys that were wounded like my brother. He was wounded on Okinawa and on Peleliu. He was wounded twice. I was very fortunate. I don't know why the good Lord spared me. I got shot at so much and had guys next to me killed, but I wasn't hit.

Mr. Sumner:

Maybe you had gotten so skinny that you weren't there.

Mr. Nitzr:

I had some awful close calls. When I was taking care of one guy a bullet went right between my legs. That could have been me too. Those banzai attacks were horrible, absolutely horrible. You'd see dead bodies out there in every kind of position imaginable. Seeing your own buddies being wounded and bleeding to death was terrible. War is just hell!! That is all I can say. It is just plain hell!!

Mr. Sumner: Sherman had it right didn't he?

Mr. Nitzr: Then, at the end of the war, it was even worse. We went to Nagasaki to inspect the damage done from the Atomic bomb. An atomic war is just unthinkable. When you can just look out over a city and see all the buildings that look like one big trash pile that has been burned. Underneath that were dead bodies. You could be walking down the streets there in Nagasaki and some of the Japs would be coming to look for their dead relatives. The Japanese word for "good day" is "Okio". We would be going down the same road, and they would spit out in front of you and look the other way and keep going. The very first night we were on occupational duty, I was with the first occupational team that went into Sasebo, that was really something. The very first night we occupied one of their barracks. It was in the wintertime, so it was cold. It was October or November. We had no sooner turned out the lights out for the night and some Japanese threw some gasoline torches against the side of our building. They were going to burn the barracks down that we were in. We all rushed out of there. We were stationed by a canal there. Everybody charged out of their bunks, they got their helmets or whatever they could to throw dirt against the fire and then we had a bucket brigade coming from that canal using helmets of water to put that fire out. Right at first they were not very friendly. MacArthur did an excellent job of getting those Japanese

people under his thumb and getting them to obey. I can remember that before we got off the ship, word went out (MacArthur's orders) that we were to conduct ourselves and that the Japanese would have field pieces pointing down our throats as we were coming into the harbor and they said they would all be covered with white sheets so we could tell where they were. Under no conditions were they to fire those things on us.

Mr. Sumner: Can you think of anything more that has suddenly come back? Maybe something that was passed over quickly that you would like to include.

Mr. Nitz: No, I think that is about it. I just feel sorry for all of the extreme loss of life. When we went into Japan, the misery and suffering that the Japanese people had to put up with was unreal. They had to almost starve themselves to death to keep the war machinery going and to keep food and supplies going. After we were in there a couple of weeks, our food caught up with us. Candy bars, cigarettes, beer, etc. were sent to us out in the islands. We'd walk down the streets and you would see these small children in the winter time and you would feel so sorry for them. They just had on rags, barefooted. If a GI was smoking a cigarette, puffing on it, they would throw it down and those kids would make a dive for it to see if they could pick up enough to take home to their parents. We used to take candy bars with us to give to the children. They would

tear the wrapper off of it and start to eat it, well another child would be there picking up the wrapper and licking it. They were hungry. Behind our Mess Hall at Sasebo we would throw scraps out in the barrels, the trash cans. You would see those Japs going in there and digging through the trash to find any kind of an old bone or anything that they could chew on. It was horrible for the Japanese people. We don't know how good we have it in this country.

Mr. Sumner: I'll second that.

Mr. Nitzr: I think that is about it.

Mr. Sumner: Thank you very much.

Transcribed by:
Wanda Cook
Hunt, Texas
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