

Tape # [redacted] Oral History Mr. Sanford Hunt
May 1993

I was born on the north end of Newark, New Jersey, Oct 18, 1915 where I stayed until 24 and went to California. (My father was in the newspaper business.) I was raised on a farm in California. I went to a 2-room school--8 grades. Each room had 4 grades, 4 rows of chairs and that was a grade--and 2 teachers. It worked out pretty well. So at the age of 14 I got a driver's license so I could drive to high-school which was allowed in California at that time if you had to drive. The State of California paid you for your gasoline and your mileage to go to school. Of course, you got as many friends to go with you as possible and then you took their checks as well at the end of the month.

I hung around there until I got out of high-school except I missed a couple of years of school when I went off cowboying in Arizona by myself. Came back and graduated. There were a lot of things going on, ordinary things that people do when they graduate from high-school and are looking for a job--truck driving and things like that. This was depression time but I worked for Marian Hollands who had just built a golf course in Santa Cruz and she needed a truck driver and you had to have a special license in California to drive any kind of a truck. So I got one and worked for her for a year and then I went to navigation school in San Francisco, joined the naval reserve and they rated me as a radioman 3/c right away.

I went to sea on the USS New Mexico and put myself on active duty--no pay and I stayed with that for about a month and a half or two months as a radio operator. I was in amateur radio first, I trained myself and got an amateur license. We lived out in the country and the radio was all hand key, there was no voice communication. We used Morse Code. That was all it took to get me a rating in the naval reserve. In the navy you may be a 3rd class petty officer when I enlisted.

I was a little awkward aboard ship the first time. I didn't know anything. I had no training, nothing whatsoever. In a month and a half went to sea again in a freighter and stayed until there was rate strike in California, the longshoremen went on strike and I got out of it then -- it was getting rough. Machine guns were set up in San Francisco along the harbor to quell the striking longshoremen and it was a little bit too much for me. That was in 1934.

A friend of mine from the golf course was going east to Colorado and I went with him and we cowboyed at his father's house. They paid me \$30 a month retrievable from a vase on top of the mantle piece each month. It was a good adventure chasing cows -- this was at Redwing, Colorado near Gardner. You go to an ice cream social on Sunday, and they have a fiddle and you go to a dance at the school on Saturday night. This was on the edge of the mountains near the desert.

I was still in the Naval Reserve, and went back to the east coast and went to work for a newspaper. Distributing the college newspapers--they gave me a job and I got mixed up with some pretty rough characters. Apparently the days of the Newhouse clan and the Annenbergs and the news and magazine distributors--it was a cut-throat business. It was a business where people were killed on a weekly basis if they got in the way of their competitors. It was just a bad time. I was in Newark at the time Dutch Schultz as machine gunned down in the cafeteria at Park Place in downtown Newark. I stayed with that for while and

then went to work for the paper. While working for the paper, I got married and there was an atelier right across the street from where I lived. I saw blue trousers with red stripes on them and I said why don't I go and try that out.

I got out of the Navy Reserve and enlisted in the Marine Corps Reserve. While I was standing there signing up, a Western Union boy came on his bicycle and delivered a telegram to the sergeant. The sergeant read the telegram and looked up at me and he said "Are you going to sign, or not going to sign?" I guess this was October 8, 1940. So I signed and the sergeant showed me the message. He said have your pack on 8 o'clock tomorrow morning—President Roosevelt had called up the reserves on the 8th. We went to Montana. I had a hash mark but no rating which led everyone to believe I had been busted at one time or another.

In those days they allowed Marine radio people to wear sparks on their sleeve. That practice has been given up. The Marines don't wear anything fancy on their uniforms except the basics. I went to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba as a radio operator. This was the first time I had had the opportunity of working closely with senior officers, like "Howling Mad" Smith. I started there and never left working with senior officers.

It was all CW and the Marines were out away from the Navy complex—we sent all our messages back and forth by CW on a two-way telephone circuit. In those days we didn't have any classified traffic to speak of. If there was, it was handled between the Naval radio station and general's staff itself.

When we came back the first brigade was formed, afterwards came the first division at Camp Lejeune. This camp had just opened, except for the supply part of it. Where we stayed was all tents and it was cold and we didn't have any winter clothes. We had a mattress under, a mattress over you and an overcoat and whatever you had—it was very cold. The division didn't have any communications outside of the division so we got the Western Union to authorize a Western Union office at our camp. Our communications officer was a major, Ed Snyder, who is now a LtGen (Ret). out in California. He put me in charge of the Western Union office. I would do things the Western Union way. We handled all our communications official and private through that little place and that's where we got our messages from Washington through the Western Union wire.

The only communication the Marine Corps had were between their tactical units and that wasn't very good. I was sitting in the theatre over in Wellington, NC with a good looking blonde when word out of Pearl Harbor came. I just put on my hat, kissed her goodbye and left. We went to Charleston, SC and the whole division sailed on the Manhattan, a liner, down the east coast through the canal. They had two destroyers for us along the Pacific side and on the east coast --nothing. I recall the captain of the ship making evasive maneuvers but the troops on there were so sick--there was a 24 hour chow line in the ship's ballroom--a foot of water and vomit was never cleaned out for the whole trip. We got into heavy weather and people got sick and I just couldn't go near the food line. Being a radio operator I went up topside and volunteered to work with the Navy guys. At least I could get toasted cheese sandwiches out of a toaster up there.

I read in the Marine Corps Gazette, the first division sailed for Australia. I was ashamed for the Gazette letting such an error get through but there it was written by a Marine Corps officer. He wrote me after I wrote a very hot letter

to the Gazette in which he said he had really written that story for the students and he was thinking too much. Anyway, we went on to New Zealand where we were set up in the Cecil Hotel which was taken for us by the New Zealand government as headquarters for the 1st Division.

Something I hadn't mentioned before. Some time when I was at Camp Lejeune, they sent me to school at the Brooklyn Navy Yard and taught me how to repair cipher machines (just two of us). When I got back I was the cipher machine repairman. I found out I was the cipher machine repair person for the entire fleet that was anchored in the harbor and I spent a good deal of time running back and forth from my headquarters at the hotel to the ships in the harbor repairing their machines.

These machines have to do with taking English and making it into unreadable five letter groups--not code. Code is a word that means all other number of words. If I set up a code with you and said Semper Fidelis that would mean for you to read page 6 in a certain book that might be a whole page full of stuff. A cipher is changing individual letters into other letters and is scrambled. And to transfer it they put it into five-letter groups. It's a letter by letter message and that's what these machines did. They first came out with those machines in late 1940 at least that's when the Marine Corps first got them. These are the ECM machines that we got from the British. Winston Churchill, the Chief of the British Secret Service had them--they got these machines from the Germans and turned them in to great thing for the U. S. along with ours. The whole thing came from the Poles. The Germans stole them when they occupied Poland. They had been working on German ciphers. They had wheels and electrical contacts and every time you hit the key they'd turn one notch. You had a regular typewriter keyboard and could encipher a message pretty fast.

I stuck with that until we got to a place where you couldn't take machines. Where you can't take machines, there is only one thing left and that is called a low grade manual cipher. A bunch of paper strips in a plastic or aluminum board. You set 24 strips horizontally in the board and then you take a vertical line where ever you want, you set your English right down that way. The you go to somewhere else on your board and you take off your cipher to break it up into five letter groups. Of course you have no know how to set your strips--the strips are numbered and that comes on a key list that is promulgated from Washington, D. C. They would change this periodically. It's not a hard cipher to get into if people repeat themselves and use the same type of comments and anything repetitive can get into it.

One of the jobs I had was to read all of the staff traffic going out and be sure that it was written in such a manner that it wouldn't jeopardize the cipher system.

On Guadalcanal I went ashore the day the general went ashore and nothing happened the first day except a lot of people shooting--didn't have anything to shoot at really. I remember the Operations Officer running around smelling rifle barrels to see who fired the last shot because the guys were jumpy and would shoot at anything they heard. The next day we uncovered a mint condition Japanese bigger control station and a mint control condition Japanese transmitter station a mile away - the two main hooked together by cables, flashing electrical lights, everything--perfect shape. Radio receivers, keys, typewriters never been used. I thought they were Japanese but they might have been Korean.

As an Asst. Division Signal Officer which was my title all the time, there were two Asst. Div. Signal Officers in the Division. One took care of tactical radio things and the other one did as he was told which was me. I took care of cryptographic machines and external communications, external to the division--two completely separate things. The general put me in charge of this radio station. We took it over. The Marines didn't have any communications that would go from the island out to a ship in the bay. Coastwatchers had a lot better communications than the Marines did. What we had to do was fire up these Japanese transmitters. There was no problem with radio silence on an island cause the island wasn't going anywhere and everyone knew we were there. We contacted New Zealand Navy and CINCPAC at Pearl Harbor on these Japanese radio transmitters and receivers. My division is considered the fleet unit and we received our communications from headquarters the same way a ship does--by fleet broadcast. No individual messages, they come clean 24 hours a day over the air and you copy them all and they are serially numbered. You take off the ones that are addressed to you only and decipher them and write them up. You are not supposed to nose around in anybody's traffic, but everyone did in order to know what was going on. It was common practice throughout the navy--all the ships copied everybody else's traffic just to find out what was going on.

I almost got in trouble-- was standing watch in the cipher room along with a bunch of lieutenants and I deciphered a message that had the day and date of where we were going to land on Guadalcanal --no other division knew this information. It was from CINCPAC fleet to Commander South Pacific on the Hawkins. We were not addressed, the division, so I did not write it up. But I had the deciphered tape and took it up and showed it to General Renniger. He said "Brother, -----". The next morning he got a telephone call from Admiral Ghormley to tell him of it. He knew what he was going up there for, but nobody else knows it. I wrote that story, have my scribbled notes here someplace. We just finished a book on General Thomas, but you don't have it in your shop here. It is all bibliographed and indexed, and I have all the stuff here that I contributed.

General Reinagraper was a good man with a pretty even temper. I knew General Thomas a lot better because after the Navy finally got their advance base units on shore, they were the ones that were supposed to be running the radio station. They never showed up, so I had the station and used sailors off of wrecked ships and Marines from the Division Signal Co. to run the station. In the meantime the Navy came in and dug a big tunnel to build a radio station. They were assisted in getting the operation by the Japanese who dropped a Daisy cutter right in dead center of the station and blew it to bits. The picture is in a lot of histories. People don't know what the picture is. I've written a letter to a lot of officers who have the picture--they don't know what it is and describe it as something else. It just blew that building all over. We went down to the transmitter station and carried on from there.

The transmitter station itself was within the Japanese pillbox, It was made out of wood and the Navy finally got their station going and operating and shortly after they were allowed to have machines in there when things got secured. We brought the cipher machines--we never had any at all. This made our job very, very difficult for several reasons. The main reason being that Richard Tregagus, Bob Miller (UP), Henry Keys (London Daily Express), and a photographer (Henry something or other)--they were allowed to go anyplace they wanted to go. There was no censorship for these reporters, they could do what

they wanted to do. They sent their press reports through us and our staff knew little nothing about communications never gave it a second thought to take it over to Lt. Hunt and he'd take care of it. We are sitting there with stacks of press stuff to do on a hand cipher which is a laborious thing and do our own work at the same time--it was a 24 hour a day job for just two cryptographers, me and a sergeant I snapped in on it. I will say they never said thank you or anything. I guess they didn't know. Anyway all that stuff went to my radio operators and transmitted to Pearl Harbor where it was deciphered and passed right to the censors at Pearl.

The censors went to work on it before they passed it on to their various agencies. There was censorship but on the face of it to see how the reporters were set loose out there on their own, someone and many people asked --they didn't have censorship like that in WWII in the early days--well it was there but nobody knew it was there.

I just wonder how many people know what the Marine Corps communicators went through to get those stories out from Guadalcanal. A few of those reporters were smart. They slipped some of their copy to the fighter pilots who were going south or if a transport plane had come in, or if they were smart they would have taken it out to somebody who was going somewhere like a ship that was moving south and then could have by-passed the system but I don't think very much of that happened.

Most important traffic that I handled was ultra traffic. Ultra traffic was traffic of the substance of which was derived from the breaking of enemy ciphers. There were only three people in the division allowed to see those messages-- General Vandegrift, General Thomas and I. Occasionally General Twang who was Operations Officer was allowed to read the paper. I stood there while General Thomas read it and he'd give it back to me and I'd take it back and burn it. That's the way it was handled. That's the way Winston Churchill wanted us to handle the stuff. That was one of the agreements made between the British and the Americans.

Interviewer: I remember how irate Britain became when they heard about the Yamamoto Mission and the risk that was involved.

Hunt: Absolutely, that was an absolute miscarriage--I think they should have let him go. Not because it was Yamamoto, but because of the breaking of the cipher systems. The reason I say that is because unfortunately Roosevelt and Churchill let several whole British cities be wiped out by the Germans during the war rather than let them know that they were reading the German messages. If they had evacuated these towns the Germans would have known immediately. So, it was their decision, Churchill along with the chief of British Secret Service. (Clark Menzies) Menzies was an Eton boy. Menzies and Churchill and their dickerings with Roosevelt on the cipher system had a great affect on a lot of things we did in the U. S. and on the lives of a lot of people. As far as Yamamoto is concerned, I think we knew a lot about him and I think that anyone who would have replaced him, we wouldn't have known anything about it. I don't think it did anything but gave the troops a momentary morale thing. I don't think it was worth the chances that were taken.

We had a commodore of the Marine Corps that came out to visit us, Holcomb I believe. He went back to Washington and made a big stink about how we found out some of these things. It was in the Washington Post and he got called up on the

carpet. They just either didn't clue him in to begin with or he just didn't have sense enough to know to keep his mouth shut.

After Guadalcanal I went with the staff and the divisions to Brisbane, Australia with Gen. Vandegrift, Col. Thomas and et al didn't like Brisbane so he just told Douglas that we wanted to go somewhere else. So they sent us down to Melbourne which was great. Three quarters of the division had malaria.

I knew Martin Clemens well from Guadalcanal, in fact I'm waiting for Martin. Have been trying to find him for two days. I want him to give me the address of Robert Miller, the UP correspondent who was with us on Guadalcanal. He told me he is still alive, has his address and promised to give it to me. Twenty years after I left Guadalcanal, 25 years after, I was sitting in my office in Danang, Vietnam and the phone rang and it was Bob Miller. "Where are you?" "I'm across the river at a beer joint." I told him I'd be right over. I got a boat and went across and sat and talked to him for a couple of hours about stories and what I thought people would like to read about, etc. I haven't seen him since and I guess that was 1968. So when Martin told me he was still alive I tried to get ahold of him. He's the only reporter I know of alive today who was on Guadalcanal, except the division public relations officer, Herbert Christian Maralot. He has written two books - Guadalcanal Remembered- in which he has a lot of this polter(?) stuff that I handled that is written in his book. He wrote an earlier book when he first came back. As far as PR people, those are the only two left that I know of.

The nice thing about it is that when you talk to somebody about these things, there is no one who can say it's true or that it's not true because none of them are alive.

A lot of people wouldn't believe the story about showing General Vandegrift the tape off the cipher machine telling where we were going to go and when we were going to land. There's one other person that knows about it besides me, but everyone else is dead--it's a true story. I wished Allen thought it was a good enough story to write an article on it, I don't know what he did with it. He wrote a real fine article on it. It's three pages and when we get done with this interview I'll let you read it.

Herb Maralot wrote some good stuff on ultra traffic in magazine articles which you may or may not have come across. "Guadalcanal", I don't know why that book doesn't sell any better than it does. The title is bad. If he called it "Secret Codes of the Pacific War" or something, he would have sold a million copies. I wrote to him last year and asked him why didn't he change the title and recirculate. He didn't reply. I don't know his health. It's such a good book. It's all about our relationships and what cryptanalysis did for us.

A book written by Anthony K. Brown tells that the Americans didn't have ultra before a certain date. I forget what the date was, but I was already handling ultra traffic in the Pacific before that date so there is something wrong with Brown's book. He lives in Florida now and I've been meaning to write and ask him why the discrepancy. Unless we called it something else and changed it from magic to something else, but my traffic said ultra on it. Actually it wasn't the ultra traffic because no one got that, what they did was all paraphrase and rearranged and then resent and then said this is from ultra sources. No one was allowed to have the direct stuff. That all came to us out of Pearl Harbor on a broadcast which we copied on the island.

The staff went to Noumea, New Caledonia and took over the Corps and I stayed on with the same job as special assistant to the general and chief of staff for special traffic and messages. Then he went back to be commandant of the Marine Corps and I was there until General Barack decided where the landing was going to be on Guadalcanal. General Barack was pretty nervous and called me into his office one afternoon about 4 o'clock and said I don't want you to tell anyone this but Col. Evie Senecker of the Third Division. He told me the total division is going Bougainville, land, and this is the date. There's an airplane waiting for you--the pilot will take you up there. I went out there by myself with my little bag. We flew without any fighter escort right up to Guadalcanal. I went in and gave the operations officer the word from General Barack--nothing in writing at all and that's what started the Bougainville operation.

They gave me the honor of going up and being the communications officer for the Bougainville operation. I enjoyed it very much. It was a quiet operation. H. V. Kaltenborn was standing on the beach with a sign "Welcome Marines" when we got there. (chuckles) I don't know why he didn't get bombarded when our ships were shooting over there but he'd come over from the other side of the island some how. I don't know how long we stayed up there.

I did a couple of other minor operations Everisle (?) and Green Island while I was with the Third Division, and then they evacuated me from Green Island back to Pearl Harbor. Not evacuated, but gave me a ride back and said here's your orders, you're going back to school. However, I never went to school. Gen. Senecker wanted me to go back officers candidate school. I was a buck sergeant, I was commissioned a 2nd Lt. which I almost didn't get, because I had committed an indiscretion two days before. When we landed there I went down to the Australian/New Zealand radio station to get their messages for us. I committed a slight indiscretion by stopping into a couple of beer parlors on the way back and they put me on hack for 30 days, gave me the silent treatment--nobody would speak to me, none of the officers and it was done on purpose. Finally the commanding officer of Headquarters Company called me in and he said "We know you had some problems, we don't think you're ever going to do this again". I just kept saying "Yes Sir, Yes Sir, Yes Sir". Then he gave me my 2nd Lts. commission and that was that.

I was a lieutenant when we got to Guadalcanal, I got promoted on Guadalcanal and got a lot of decorations.

We then went back to the states, and that's the end of the South Pacific for me, except Vietnam.

I was let out in 1969 on disability and was retired in 1975. I taught the first communications officers school in Quantico. That's where they sent me instead of officers candidate school. They wanted me to teach Navy communications and cryptography. That's where I met my second wife. I sent her to crypto school at Portsmouth. So when she came back there were only two of us allowed in the cryptographic room at night except the students. No one else was allowed to go in there except my sergeant and I. That's how we became enamored and got married a week after my first wife divorced me. In spite of what the lady lieutenants at Quantico said, you shouldn't be marrying an enlisted girl Captain and of course that wasn't the problem--it was digging into their pocketbooks. I'd been spending money on these ladies--Marine officers, and all of a sudden I spent it on a sergeant and they thought they were getting cut out of a lot of

nice things. We had our 48th wedding anniversary last week.

She stayed a sergeant until our first child came along and Admiral Torey's wife saw to it that the day after we were married (the captain and the sergeant) that she would get transferred off the base, and they did transfer her. Course I had it fixed with her lieutenant whom I knew pretty well, "I said when she gets transferred can't we arrange where she to go." They made it Washington, DC so we had a little motel room half way between Washington and Quantico and we lived there with another young couple who didn't have an automobile.

But there were a lot of people like that in those days and I go along with it, most of it. Another time I got 30 days unofficial hack for violation of a military driving law because I had our chief radioman and his girl in the car with me. General Thomas was very upset, he said "You're not supposed to be out there associating with people", I said "Yes, Sir". "Thirty days you have to stay in your apartment". He didn't know where I lived. I had the wildest apartment you ever saw. "Thirty days in your apartment except coming to work". At the end of the 30 days, I went in and said "I've done it, 30 days is over", and he took the report tore it up and threw it in the wastebasket. General Thomas was a great man and a great brain. He was the father of amphibious warfare. He died with a Marine Corps lineal list under his pillow. If your name was on the list and there were two of you, and person A's number was smaller than person B's, then person A got the job. But, you better do it or you're gone. That was General Thomas. Strictly in accordance of rank but if you can't handle the job, you are out, you might as well resign because you're finished with the Marine Corps. If you were on his team that's the way it worked. And being on teams is not very good because if the team changes then all the team members have a hard time from then on, because there's another team and there was a very strong anti-Thomas faction the Marine Corps--but not as long as he was alive. He was not easy on people who didn't work and weren't faithful to the Corps.

He had his own people, he made commandants, and he made generals and he made senior officers. He made more influence over what happened in the Corps in those days than any other single persons.

Marines are Marines and it doesn't make any difference what they do. They are all expected to do the same thing, all expected to handle rifles and communications. In later years I was chief of research and development in the Marine Corps, among other things. The first assistant chief of staff G-6 which is communications in Vietnam. Never had one before, it was just another staff officer. But over there we had Army, Navy, Air Force, two Marine Divisions and Corps headquarters needed a very senior officer to run the communications. We had 15,000 communicators over there.