

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

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. Lawrence Norris

August 18, 2001

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(1st Marine Division - Guadalcanal, Peleliu, Okinawa)**

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is August 18, 2001. I'm interviewing Mr. Lawrence Norris at his home at 103 Brown Street in Fulton, Indiana. This interview is in support of the National Museum Pacific War Center for Pacific War Studies for the preservation of historic information related to World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer: I want to thank you for taking the time to tell us about your experiences today. Let me ask you first, when were you born?

Mr. Norris: July 5, 1914.

Mr. Misenhimer: OK, and where were you born?

Mr. Norris: In a log house northeast of Fulton, Indiana.

Mr. Misenhimer: Just a few miles from here then?

Mr. Norris: About that. It's just right across the creek from where Hip and Esther Miller live.

Mr. Misenhimer: What were your parents' names?

Mr. Norris: Hugh V. Norris and Blanch Norris.

Mr. Misenhimer: And where were they born?

Mr. Norris: My mother was born in Fowler, Indiana, and my Dad was born in Kewanna, Indiana.

Mr. Misenhimer: OK, so they were both native Hoosiers then?

Mr. Norris: Yes, they lived about all of their lives in Liberty Township here near Fulton.

Mr. Misenhimer: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

Mr. Norris: I have two brothers; Arnold, he's two years younger than me, and my brother, Don, was four years younger.

Mr. Misenhimer: OK. Were they also in World War II?

Mr. Norris: My brother, Don, was in the Navy. My brother, Arnold, wasn't.

Mr. Misenhimer: Where did you go to school?

Mr. Norris: Fulton.

Mr. Misenhimer: And again, did you graduate from there?

Mr. Norris: Yes. I graduated in 1932 from Fulton High School.

Mr. Misenhimer: OK. What did you do when you graduated from high school?

Mr. Norris: Worked for a dollar a day for Ott McMahan on the farm, and then in the late 30's I worked in Chicago for a while where they made plastic and then I got married in 1940 and I worked at Armours Cheese Factory in Rochester. Then I was on the Security Police at Kingsbury Ordinance Plant for two years. That's when I went into the Marine Corps. I volunteered.

Mr. Misenhimer: And when did you go into the Marines?

Mr. Norris: November of 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer: Why did you choose that branch?

Mr. Norris: I'm not sure. There was a fellow from Akron, Cleotus Dane and he asked me to go into the Marines with him and we went in. We stayed together just about all of the time.

Mr. Misenhimer: Where did you take your training?

Mr. Norris: San Diego.

Mr. Misenhimer: How long was that training?

Mr. Norris: Let's see. I think it was about 12 weeks before we went overseas and then they sent us to New Caledonia to the Marine Raider Unit. From there I joined the 1st Marine Division at Guadalcanal.

Mr. Misenhimer: Let's go back to when you left San Diego. Did you go straight from there to New Caledonia?

Mr. Norris: Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer: This was just after you had 12 weeks of training? So you had only been in about three months at that point?

Mr. Norris: Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer: What rank did you have then?

Mr. Norris: PFC.

Mr. Misenhimer: How long did it take you to get to New Caledonia?

Mr. Norris: A long time by that ship. It had been a French luxury liner. I can't think of the name of it now. They zig-zagged all the way over there. Changed course every ten minutes. Then they took us out into the jungles of New Caledonia. Well, there was a jungle village right across a little creek from where we were. Those people were something else. There was one native man, I will never forget him. All he wore, it looked like a red diaper. I don't

know what he ever did. Just saw him walking around. I know one day I heard a little girl scream, and boy did she scream. I looked and it was quite a ways off across the little creek. I looked, and another little girl was chasing her with a machete. They took out into the jungle. I don't know what happened.

Mr. Misenhimer: You say you took your raider training there?

Mr. Norris: Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer: What group was that?

Mr. Norris: Oh, I don't know. I don't remember now.

Mr. Misenhimer: OK. How long was that training?

Mr. Norris: Oh, we were there I suppose three or four months.

Mr. Misenhimer: What type of training was this?

Mr. Norris: Jungle warfare.

Mr. Misenhimer: Physical conditioning?

Mr. Norris: Yes. I was a little older than most of them. I was 27 when I went in and a lot of those kids were 17 and 18. Some of that training, I thought they were going to kill me. Well for a little while I had been a foreman at Bendix Home Appliances in South Bend. Just standing around. Then run, run, run. All of that physical stuff. But I finally got toughened to it and I could outdo the kids when I got toughened to it.

Mr. Misenhimer: The Raider group – did they go on somewhere else? You didn't go with them? Or what happened then?

Mr. Norris: Well, I don't know. We left there on the ship. They took us up by Guadalcanal. That ship was a mess. I don't think I'd get on it again. It wasn't too fancy. I know one day – they did feed you two meals a day. Things were segregated back then and there was a, well – I think he was a Sergeant. But anyway, they fed this group of black guys first and he just had a fit. Cause they had the blacks eat ahead of us. It didn't bother me any. I don't feel that way. They're people too, just like me. In fact, my son is married to a black girl.

Mr. Misenhimer: This group of blacks, were they soldiers or what were they?

Mr. Norris: I'm not sure. They had black Seabees, I believe they were.

Mr. Misenhimer: Black Seabees. OK. When you got to Guadalcanal, what did you do there?

Mr. Norris: Well, we joined the 1st Marine Division. It was just more training. Of course I was pretty well built back then. Now I'm about nothing. But I joined "Easy" Company, 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines. The Lieutenant saw me and wanted me to operate a flame thrower. So I took flame thrower training. There were five or six of us that took flame thrower training. I know this one fellow was supposed to help me. There was supposed to be two flame throwers. Grover Townsend was his name. He was a Corporal and I was a PFC and when we started together I said, "Well, Grover, why don't you take it one time and I'll take it the next." "Oh, all

right.” That flame thrower, when it was loaded, weighed 73 pounds strapped to your back. The first time he jumped out of one of those landing barges he left it on his back and he couldn’t get up. I said, “Grover, you just as well let me carry it from now on..” And I did. I’ll never forget the last time I saw him was when we landed on Peleliu. We were in the first wave. I had that thing on my back and we jumped out and it was terrible. The Japanese enemy fire, it was just constant. He couldn’t get the bolt back. He carried a Tommy gun. He couldn’t get the bolt back and the things he called that Tommy gun! He had picked up a lot of stuff in Australia. Anyway, there was a wrench we used on that flame thrower and he had that wrench beaten on the bolt of that Tommy gun. Finally I looked and I said, “Grover, the safety is on.” Well, he flipped the safety and back with the bolt, and I’ve never seen him since. He got hit. I think he was from Connecticut. Boy that was terrible.

Mr. Misenhimer: Let’s go back to Guadalcanal. You took your training there. You mentioned Australia. Did you all go to Australia or something?

Mr. Norris: No. I joined them after they left Australia.

Mr. Misenhimer: OK. The 1st Marines came there after, so they had been to Australia. This is the 1st Marine Division. Was Vandergriff still the Commanding General then?

Mr. Norris: Yes, he was. Well, when we went to Peleliu Chesty Puller was – I believe he was the Regimental Commander. He was one

wonderful fellow. He was a dandy. I'm telling you when you had inspection if it was transport packs, Chesty had a transport pack on. And I know one day we had inspection down there on Guadalcanal, he stopped in front of me and he looked at me a little bit, and he said, "How long have you been over here son?" I was always kind of glad that a guy with his reputation, to think I got to talk to him. He was just one of the fellows. Of course he went in World War I and was a private. He came up through the ranks and he knew what it was. He knew the score.

Mr. Misenhimer: When you left Guadalcanal, did you go straight to Peleliu, or did you stop some place else?

Mr. Norris: Well, let's see. The one island off of Guadalcanal, they call it Poovoo and we left there. We went on LSTs from Poovoo to Peleliu, and then --

Mr. Misenhimer: Quite a ways isn't it?

Mr. Norris: Yes it is. It took us three weeks to get there. Of course on these LSTs they had what they called a tank deck down below. I'll always remember one guy, Hurd Coleman was his name. I think he was from New Hampshire. Anyway, when you make a landing they get you up real early. And, oh, did they feed you breakfast. You get a real good meal that day. A lot of those guys, it was the last meal they ever got. But, this Hurd Coleman, we were getting ready to go down to the tank deck and get on these landing barges,

and they all called me Buck over there. He, Hurd, we shook hands and he said, "I'll see you on the beach." I've never seen him since. He got into a machine gun nest some way and they sent him back to the States. I got a letter from him after that and he was in a hospital back here for 18 months. I think he lives in California now. That's all I remember of him. On the beach then, this fellow from Akron that I went in with, he was in a motor platoon and I was in the rifle company. He got hit on the beach. It hit him in the ankle some way, or the foot. His feet were so swollen he couldn't wear his shoes any more. He had to run around in his sock feet and he said a Lieutenant saw him and later that day he told him to get down to the beach and they'll take you out to the hospital ship. He missed all of the fun. He was a wonderful buddy.

Mr. Misenhimer: So you went in with the first wave then?

Mr. Norris: Yes, the first wave.

Mr. Misenhimer: What is a landing barge?

Mr. Norris: It's a --

Mr. Misenhimer: Is it a Higgins boat?

Mr. Norris: That's about it.

Mr. Misenhimer: OK. A Higgins boat.

Mr. Norris: It was one terrible battle. That's the day I overcame fear. They took the island to knock out an airport so MacArthur could strut in on the Phillipines. I never had much use for that guy. We

were on the south edge of the airport. A sergeant and I were in a hole together. You couldn't dig much of a hole, but you could pile up coral and stack up pieces around, and get behind it. We looked and here came those Japanese across the airport in tanks. For a little bit I kind of lost it. I thought, what am I going to do to get a tank with a flame thrower? Just one charge would last 12 seconds.

Mr. Misenhimer: That's all you had?

Mr. Norris: That was it. Well, it's no good after that. I set it up against a tree and there were so many dead Marines around there I just picked up a rifle and bayonet and his ammunition belt, but here comes these tanks. That kind of got me. I said, "What can I do now?" I ran back and got behind a little ridge and I was there maybe 10-15 minutes. I said, "I can't do this." And I went back out there and chased them. Of course they knocked the tanks out, but one of the fellows I had taken flame-thrower training with, he was from Indianapolis. He jumped up to shoot one of those tanks with his flame thrower. Of course like it was, the Marines had these old style flame throwers. They ignited with a flint like a cigarette lighter, only it was a bigger flint. His didn't ignite and the Japanese shot him with a 37 cannon. Hit him in the chest. I can't remember his name. Harmon I think was his name. But anyway,

the tanks were all knocked out and we spent the night there on the edge of the airport. The next morning we moved up and “Easy” Company went through the jungle at the edge of the airport and they sent “Fox” company right across. I always thought that was a really stupid thing, to send “Fox” Company across the open airport and over in there. Back on the other side of the airport were all these ridges and caves full of Japanese. At the edge of the airport we could see those fellows out there. If a Marine got hit, there he’d lay for a little bit before fellows with a stretcher would run out and get him. Just as soon as they’d get him on the stretcher and start back with him, those Japanese would shoot all five of them. I never did understand why they would want “Fox” Company to cross the airport we made it around the other side. The Japanese had prepared, they had quite a defense. They had a machine gun nest there with one of those, well it was a dome concrete thing like you see in pictures and TV. But they were in there with a machine gun and when we got up there they killed three of our fellows. This poor Gazett was one of them. A few days before, well it was on our way up there. He had gotten a letter from his Dad and they’d had a policy, three campaigns and they’d send them back to the States for a month. Well, there had been so many casualties, they quit it. He read a part of his letter from his Dad and his Dad had written in there and said, “Well, I guess, son, they’re going to keep you over there

till they kill you.” And he was killed there at that machine gun nest. Another good friend of mine, Stanley Nasternack, from Chicago, I didn’t have any children. He had a little girl at home, three years old. And I can realize now how homesick that guy was. Those Japs shot him in the legs and when he fell, they almost cut him in two around the stomach with a machine gun. Then there was a Billy Helton from Detroit. There were brothers in our platoon, Billy and Ralph Helton. And Billy was killed there. One of our tanks out there on the airport. I know I ran out there and motioned for a tank to come over and he came over and with that cannon he shot that machine gun next and that was the end of that. We slept back of what we called Bloody Nose Ridge. We stayed there that night. There was, I think, three days and nights that we fought day and night, no sleep. Oh, maybe ten, fifteen minutes you could sleep. Another fellow I had spent the night there with him, can’t think of his name now, he was from Tennessee, and he got hit in the shoulder with a piece of shrapnel. And another fellow, I’ll never forget him, Art Holmes. You’re supposed to have brains enough that when the Japs start shooting mortars – get down! But, Art didn’t. A piece of shrapnel hit him in the stomach. Part of his intestines came out and he looked up and he said, “Would you hold my hand?” “I’m not going to make it.” He squeezed real tight and every once in a while he said, “Am I getting any weaker?” And I

said, "Nah, you're all right." And he lived about 15 minutes. But then is when we went on up to what we called Bloody Nose Ridge. I'll never forget it. It was kind of quiet for a while and there were three of us that fixed some coral around that we could lay behind. We had just laid down there, it was quiet and some Marine got to poking around in a hole in the ridge and in a little bit some Jap inside of there shot him. The Lieutenant hollered, "Hey, Buck, get two guys and get this fellow some cover fire." Well, the two guys with me, the three of us went up and we separated and I told them, "I'll fire first into that hole." Just one, two, three. Well that's the way we did it. This guy with a bazooka, it's about like a mortar shell only it's held up at your shoulder. The guy fired that in the hole. I know we hadn't much more than gotten out of that place where we had fixed to lay down, we just had gone up to the ridge and the Japs dropped a mortar shell right in that place where we had been. God wanted me to come home for some reason.

Mr. Misenhimer: You weren't carrying your flame thrower then?

Mr. Norris: No, I had a rifle and bayonet. You wonder. There were so many close calls, and why. I was talking to a buddy Marine in Rochester. He was with the 3rd Marine Division. That's when we went to Trinity Church together. One Sunday we were talking about it, and he said, "Well, you had a guardian angel up there." There were so many, many times I almost got it. Just makes you

wonder, why. So many “whys” in a lifetime. Like my first wife was sick for 15 years. She had Parkinsons. I stayed there and took care of her, north of town. And then when she died, there was a beauty operator in Rochester that used to come out and do her hair. She sang at the funeral, “Some day He’ll Make it Plain to Me. Some Day I’ll Understand.” And I believe that. In fact, when I was Sheriff, I was the only Sheriff that belonged to the Gideons. Oh, I’ve spoken at a lot of churches. Well, it wasn’t all for the Gideons, they used to just call me. One time they called me to speak at some kind of a church conference at Tyner, Indiana. That’s up close to Walkerton and west of Plymouth. Anyway, I was supposed to speak in the morning, and I thought I’d get that over and get back to Rochester. Well, they handed me a program and they had me down for another speech in the afternoon. And they had a meal. While I ate, I worked on another talk and I made it. After it was all over, there were five ministers that came and talked to me. One of them I knew. There’s five ministers came and asked if I would fill in for them if they wanted to take a Sunday off. I said, “I can’t be Sheriff and do that.” Wouldn’t work.

Mr. Misenhimer: Back of Peleliu then, what day – how many days after invasion were we talking about a moment ago.

Mr. Norris: We were there 18 days. Sixty-four in the platoon the morning we landed. Eight days later there were 13 of us left.

Those Japanese, well, they told us that they thought if they died for the Emperor they went right straight to heaven. I sent a lot of them. But they were suicidal. I don't know – I can't figure them. I went back over there for the 50th anniversary of the battle, and those Japanese are cleaner people than we are. The Chinese live like hogs. In fact, I went back to Okinawa for the 50th anniversary of the battle.

Mr. Misenhimer: Were you at Okinawa also?

Mr. Norris: Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer: On Peleliu, the 18 days, where the Japanese dug into caves there pretty bad?

Mr. Norris: Caves. They had caves, every ridge over there, they had a cave in it. And the same thing was on Okinawa. They'd get in those caves.

Mr. Misenhimer: Now, anything you recall about Peleliu? Any other incidents? You were telling me you all had made this place with coral and the Japs put a mortar in it.

Mr. Norris: A little bit after that, oh, what did they call them? It's kind of a tank, but anyway, this fellow brought some – all we had to eat was what we carried in with us. I know they gave us one of those, it was a great big chocolate bar. It's like a kind of cooking chocolate. If you took a bite of it you had to have a drink. And we had no water to drink. Well, we found a bomb crater with rain water in it

and a lot of wiggle tails, but we drank it. We carried those little white pills. I can't remember the name of them.

Mr. Misenhimer: Chlorine or pelazine?

Mr. Norris: It was a white pill you put in your canteen and shake it a while. If you push your canteen down real quick, it bubbles when it fills and the most of the wiggle tails will swim away. You get a few, but when you're thirty – you can go without food, but it's awful to have to go without a drink of water. One hundred and twenty it would get there in the daytime, and no water to drink. I always think about the time on Okinawa, water was always scarce, but we were moving up and we crossed the island of Okinawa with very little opposition. When we started south though, that's when the battle started. We were moving up one time and we came across a great big bomb crater that had about four feet of water in it. It was clear. You could see clear to the bottom. So we decided that everybody would fill their canteens and then we'd take a bath. That's what we did. But the next morning, we were getting ready to move up and there was a path that came down the ridge, and I could see the water run down that path at the end of the bomb crater. I was just walking around, looking, and up there on that path laid a dead horse. There was very little left of him; about all decayed. Just the hide and the bones were there. But that water had run past that horse out into the crater. A buddy of mine from Detroit

happened to see me and he said, “Well, let’s go and see if the soap has settled.” He wanted to fill his canteen again. You’d drink the water you had taken a bath in. I’ve wondered so many times, how did I ever make it home, living like that. But here I am.

Mr. Misenhimer: OK. Then on Peleliu when you wound up there, anything you remember that happened on Peleliu?

Mr. Norris: Well, I talked pretty mean to a Marine Captain one time. He didn’t do anything either. Like I told you, we hardly had enough water to drink and they had put me in charge of five other fellows. There were six of us to go on an outpost in the jungle. Well, I went to get – they had put water in gasoline drums and oil drums. We had 55 gallon drums before we left down there. And you could hardly drink it. It had been in there for a month. So I went and got some of that water. I had a can, I think it held three gallons of water, on my shoulder. There was a tent with a gasoline lantern and a great big aluminum bowl, and that thing was pretty near full of fruit cocktail. And this Abby Bowers from Chicago was with me. I was carrying the water. I said, “Here Abby. Take our canteen cups and get us some of that.” We went over to get it and that Captain wouldn’t let him have it because he wasn’t with their outfit. And I soon told that Captain what I thought of him. You know, he never made a move. I had that can of water on my shoulder and I thought if he comes over I’m going to hit him with it.

But he looked at me a little bit and then hung his head and didn't do anything. I'd say "Sir" to guys and salute them. Some of those officers weren't fit to speak to.

Mr. Misenhimer: These were Marine officers, right?

Mr. Norris: Yes. He never said a word back to me.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you get your fruit cocktail.

Mr. Norris: No, we didn't get any. Oh, mercy.

Mr. Misenhimer: What happened up on the outpost? Anything happen up there?

Mr. Norris: Well, the only thing was it rained all night and it was so dark you couldn't see your hand out in front of you. But some way or another we had our hammocks with us. We stretched them up there in just a little group. Stretched them up between a couple of trees and this one fellow – he was a guy that seemed like everything he did, he did it wrong. We'd set up and two of us on watch at a time. I think we took two hours a piece. Fletcher was that guy's name. Of course, I was in charge of the group and oh, it was dark. It was stupid to be out there. You couldn't see anything. You didn't know what for, but, anyway, little bitty Hud said, "My hammock came down." Well, I said, "Sleep there on the ground." Well, he just laid down right behind me and this other fellow, Abby Bowers from Chicago. I don't know where he had been, but he came back over by me and this Fletcher turned over so twigs snapped and cracked, and Abby tried to hit him in the head with the butt of his

BAR. He missed his head. We just laughed about it. That's about all I can remember. We went back down by Guadalcanal to Peleliu. I know my buddy from Akron, we went back on a ship. I looked out and there stood Cleo out there watching the sea. He told me he'd been on a ship out there in the ocean and watched us up there on Bloody Nose Ridge. He said, "I don't know how you ever lived." Those Japanese....

Mr. Misenhimer: When you went back to there, did you get more training, or get replacements, or what happened?

Mr. Norris: We went back to Peleliu and then they sent replacements over from the States. You get reorganized, and then we got ready for Okinawa. I knew these two fellows from boot camp. This Cleo Dane from Akron and Bill Hockday from Detroit. The three of us all landed together. I thought I'd rather be over in the mortar platoon with them. I asked the Lieutenant if I could transfer. He said, "I hate to see you go, but if you want to, all right." He was a wonderful officer. Leo Hite was his name. So I got transferred to the mortar platoon. I know I went over there. I packed up all of my gear and went over to headquarters and they assigned me to one of the gun squads and this fellow named Bender was in charge of the gun squad. I was in pretty good shape. I laid my gear down and I went like that and I screamed like Tarzan. This Bender said, "Anybody want to take on the 2nd Gun Squad?" I hadn't been there

only a few days and this Lieutenant Jaffy, in charge of the Mortar Platoon, he said, “Buck knows what a machine gun looks like, a machine gun nest.” He made me a Forward Observer. I thought I’d be back of the hill from now on dropping shells on the mortar. I was a Forward Observer and that was an experience, I’ll tell you.

Mr. Misenhimer: What outfit were you with now? What Marine Division?

Mr. Norris: The same outfit, only Headquarters Company instead of “Easy” Company.

Mr. Misenhimer: I mean, it wasn’t the 1st Marine Division was it?

Mr. Norris: Yes. But we were in reserve. You see, everything in the Marine Corps was three. There’s three companies make a battalion, three platoons make a company, and three companies make a battalion, and three battalions make a Regiment. That was an experience I had there. They picked a lot of fellows one day who wanted to go to school to learn to load ships. Well, I thought that would be better than going – maybe I’ll get to unload it. Well, I know there was two of us from Headquarters Company. We went to this school and after the schooling was over I had an examination. I got the highest grade in the battalion. This Sam Dawasey, he had been in college two years and he was next to me and we got rewarded. We got the hardest part of the ship. I’ll never forget that. They had a group of white Seabees and a group of black Seabees, and they’d work 12 hours on and 12 hours off. Sam and I

just worked 24 hours and never quit. We worked and helped load this stuff to start with. At times you'd just get so tired. I know once I was standing there I went to sleep standing up and I almost fell down. Sam Dawsy laughed and laughed. Finally he went over and sat down. There was a pallet with some mortar shells on it. He sat down on that thing and he fell off of it sound asleep. I had the last laugh. Mercy, that was awful. We worked for 45 hours without any sleep.

Mr. Misenhimer: You were loading, getting ready to go to Okinawa?

Mr. Norris: When we got to Okinawa I went in with the mortar battalion. I don't know who unloaded the ship. We run reserve on Okinawa. Like I told you, everything is in three's. But in Peleliu we were in the assault. Two companies in assault and one in reserve. The 7th was in reserve in Peleliu. Then on Okinawa it was the 1st Regiment. Very little happened in the landing. We just walked in. Oh, there would be some guy take a shot at you with a rifle, but very seldom. We even crossed the island with very little opposition. When we started south then things picked up.

Mr. Misenhimer: How did you get from the Solomon Islands up to Okinawa?

Mr. Norris: We went on a big ship. They have that rope net that went down the side and you get in the landing barges. These landing barges, they dumped us. Well, they didn't go all the way in. I know the water was about knee deep. And we walked, just waded

in and this fellow from Pittsburgh, TX, Eddie K. Hammond, he was carrying the base plate to the mortar. Well, this buddy of mine was his squad leader. Eddie was scared of him. He started wading in and all at once Eddie disappeared. There were big holes out there. Eddie went down in, I supposed it was 10-12 feet deep, but he fell in. In a little bit he came up and he still had the base plate. He was scared of Cleve and he staggered around there a little bit trying to get his footing and he fell in again. He came up and he had that base plate. And we went on in then. We hadn't any more than gotten in and a Jap in one of those Zero planes were circling around. You could see this guy looking out of the cockpit and he – well, there were two airports right there and he landed at that airport. He hadn't much more than landed and I could hear a BAR. You can tell by the sound of those guns what it is. Of course, that was the end of him. They told us afterward that he landed over there and asked for gasoline.

Mr. Misenhimer: On an American strip?

Mr. Norris: No, he landed on that airport and asked for gasoline. He thought they were Japanese down there. They were Marines. I know we watched two planes fight there one time. One of our planes and a Japanese plane. Finally they got so high it looked like two specks up there. In a little bit we could see a puff of smoke. I don't know which one got it. There's so much of that stuff you

forget. Many years in between here that I just wiped out. But the older I get, the more it comes back to me.

Mr. Misenhimer: You mentioned here your company was in reserve. So when did you go in then?

Mr. Norris: See, there was the 1st, the 5th, and the 7th Regiments in the 1st Marine Division. Then the 5th and the 7th went in, and of course they hadn't much more than gotten in there when we went in. We followed them right in. We crossed the island. There's a book, if you ever get the chance to find one, "A Girl with a White Flag." It's the story of a little Okinawan girl. I think she was seven years old and he tells what happened to her. I think she had a brother ten and two older sisters. Their Dad's job was to get food to the Japanese soldiers and he'd take it to them. One time he never came back.

Mr. Misenhimer: They took food to the Japanese?

Mr. Norris: Their Dad did. But this brother and the three girls would get out at night and they'd try to find things to eat. They stayed on the beach one night and the brother was killed. I believe he was ten, and this little girl was seven. They buried her brother, she tells, on the beach with their hands in the sand. They dug a hole and buried him, and then the three girls would wander around and for some reason she got separated from the other sisters. If I find that book, I'll get it for you. It's the "Girl with the White Flag."

Her Dad had told her and all these kids, he said, “If it looks like they are going to shoot you, smile.” She got in a cave one time. There was an older couple and she tells how this man, he had been wounded and had maggots on him. She tells how she helped clean the maggots off of him. And then this man, he tore up a shirt so she would have a white flag. That’s where she got the title of the book, “The Girl with the White Flag.” She got out and there was a photographer from this country who saw her and took her picture. I mean that’s a story. I’ll get you a book if I can find one.

Mr. Misenhimer: I’ll look in the library.

Mr. Norris: Well, I put one up there in the library in Rochester. That was after Margaret died and I put it in there in her memory. It might still be there. Man what a story that little girls – she grew up, finished grade school and high school, and went to college and there was some television in Japan that sent her to this country and she tells about that. She wanted to find this photographer that had taken her picture over there. She found him. He was in Texas. She found him and talked to him. Boy that is a story.

Mr. Misenhimer: Yes, it sounds like it. So then when you started south in Okinawa, it got a lot tougher then, right?

Mr. Norris: Oh, it was awful. Pitiful. They really – those Japanese mean business. They don’t fool around. I got hit on the south end of the island once and when they brought me back on a truck, just a

big old 10 wheeler with that metal bed. We went by Naha and that city was nothing but rubble. There was, I remember, there was one building that you could see and one side was gone, but there was a cross on it, so I suppose it was a church. They brought me back up north a ways to a tent hospital. They brought my meals to me for two or three days. There were several tents there. But the tent on one side of me, I supposed there were 12-15 feet apart. There was an Indian boy, a lot of Navaho Indians in the Marines Corps. This Indian boy, I don't know what was the matter with him, but the nurse would come to give him a shot and he had on some kind of pajamas. I never figured where he got them. He would see this nurse coming and he would roll over on his stomach and she was going to give him a shot in the behind. She'd stick him and he'd scream! I know it didn't hurt him that bad. He'd scream and you could have heard him for half a mile.

Mr. Misenhimer: Tell me about some of your experiences as a forward observer.

Mr. Norris: Well, we were going south on Okinawa and these people lived in, there might be four or six little houses in a little group. Usually they had hedge trees around that. I supposed that was for the typhoons. We got in this little group of houses. There was a machine gun there some place. Some officer sent a runner over to me. They wanted mortar fire. There was a little ridge there. I suppose it was maybe 8-10 feet high. I crawled up that ridge to the

top and I saw a building out there. I thought, maybe that's where the machine gun nest is. Well, I radioed back to the mortar platoon. I'll never forget it. "Volcan how to Volcan how." And the Lieutenant answered me. I gave him a fire order and then those mortars came up and dropped. In a little bit he radioed and he said, "The round is on the way." I peaked over that ridge to see if I was on target and a bullet went just right by my left ear. I could hear it go by. I jerked my head down and I saw the next one crease the dirt just above my head and I was on target. I did see the shells and I took one step to my left and a mortar landed in front of me and it was a dud. There were three things in about half a minute. I should have died. God wanted me to come home for some reason. Wanted me to be Sheriff.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did they get the machine gun nest?

Mr. Norris: Never heard any more, so I suppose I got it. It stopped. There's another time. We were up on a ridge. This Lieutenant we had in the mortar platoon, he messed up one day. He got three of the guys in the mortar platoon and I don't know where they got a jeep. They stole it some way or just took it, and they went over to an Army outfit to get food. He stole a bunch of stuff, but they

caught the guys. Well, they told them the Lieutenant sent them. Jaffey was his name. He was a Jew. They gave him a platoon up on the front lines and they sent another Lieutenant back to the mortar platoon. Romelo Russeo was his name. He was a nice guy. But poor old Jaffey, they sent him up to the front lines. One time he sent, course he knew me well and he knew I was a forward observer. At that ridge, that was Ronna Ridge, "Hey Buck, there's a real nice place for you right up there." Well, there were two young fellows. They looked like they were about 17-18 years old and they had fixed them up a pretty nice little hole and I went up and asked them if I could use their hole for a little while. I had the mortars fire several round here and there. Well, what you do in the daylight, you pick targets and at night you fire on them by numbers. You can't see anything. I had done that. And this DeLavichia, there was a John DeLavichia with me. We got out of that hole and we came back, I suppose down the ridge 25-30 feet and those two boys went back up there and got back in the hole where they were. The Japs put a mortar in that hole and jut blew them all to pieces. It rained for about ten days. I think it rained every day. We'd fight a little every day. Nothing much happened. A Sergeant, I think he was in "George" Company, had been a ju-jit-su instructor in the States, and sent some kid over to tell me where he thought there were some Japs. Well, Vech, that's what they called DeLavichia,

we went over there. This guy said, "Come on." We walked around that ridge we'd fought for about a week or better, and he and I would go. I didn't even have my ammunition belt. I had my rifle and it had one clip in it. The Vech, he saw where we were and he stayed back. We got clear over around that ridge and I can't think of that Sergeant's name. He was pointing out where he thought the Japs were. Here comes this Vech running and the Japs took a shot at him. I said, "They should have hit me." "You stay back there." Oh, that just the way we talked to each other. I know another time it was on Okinawa, there was a narrow gauge railroad there. That was the cutest little railroad. Like the one up there at Wakarusa. Anyway, we started up that way and a machine gun started. We got down in the ditch and this Vech hollered at me, "Hey, Buck. Watch this." He'd raise up real slow so his back end would show. That Jap would shoot at him and he'd drop real quick. Pretty soon it got quiet again, and I said, "It's going to get dark pretty soon. We've got to get up there and get our targets for the night." I said, "I'll go first." I said, "When you get up, run." There were five of us. They never fired a shot. So somebody got them I reckon. I know I crawled out over this little hill like, or ridge, and there was three other Marines out there and that's when I traded a Tommy gun. I never liked those things. You fired them and they would rear on you. But anyway, there come seven Japanese in single file.

I said, "Well, look there." I'll never forget, I fired at one of them and aimed at his feet. I shot that guy right up the back. They got around behind us at the end of that ridge. And we all scattered. There wasn't much you could do. They were all around behind there. They were shooting back at us. The Japs had dug a trench there, and there one place there, I suppose five or six feet, where the trench had caved in and we had to go up over the top of it. Well, Vech started over and one of his canteens came unhooked. We stopped and there I was right out in the open. The Japs spotted me and it went right past my face. I was down on my hands and knees, and the dirt flew up in my face from the bullet when it hit the ground. He said, "Oh, my canteen." I reached back and I belted him, and I said, "The hell with your canteen – get going." He did, and we got out of there. And that was another funny thing happened. Before we went out across the ridge to get my targets for the night, we'd later packed some stuff down and there was just a little bank of dirt there, and I said, "There's a good place to dig our foxhole for the night." We later packed some stuff down and we went on over. When we got back there was a Lieutenant and a Sergeant that decided they kind of liked that place and they jut threw our gear over the side, and you don't argue with a Lieutenant. So Vech and I fixed us another place. Well, then there were some trucks, I don't know what they called them. They had a launcher

on them and as those shells came down they would fire like a mortar shell and there were two trucks that got up there. They fired their load and took off. Well, about that time the Japs started firing mortars back. A mortar landed in that hole where the Sergeant and Lieutenant were and killed them. And that's where we were going to stay. There are so many things like that. Why? Why? Why? I don't know.

Mr. Misenhimer: Guardian Angel.

Mr. Norris: I'll never forget the morning I left for the Marine Corps. I was down at Mom and Dad's. My Dad and an uncle took me to Rochester. We lived just north of town here. It's where I grew up, about a mile and a half on 25. I know I look back and Mom had her face up against the glass, crying and waving at me. She died while I was in the Marine Corps. She used to write a lot of poetry. She wrote one about Hitler. I keep saying I'm going to get all that stuff together. I've got a lot of it in her own handwriting. I just don't do it. I'm not going to be around here forever.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you get many letters while you were overseas? Letters from home?

Mr. Norris: Oh yes. My birthday is July 5th, and I'll always remember one time. Of course Mom was dead, but Dad sent me a birthday box. He mailed it in May for my birthday, the 5th of July. I got it in October. He knew I had these two buddies I was with. He put

three chocolate bars in there and it turned white. We ate it. It was good.

Mr. Misenhimer: Do you recall some other things on Okinawa?

Mr. Norris: Well, there is one, but you can't hardly tape it.

Mr. Misenhimer: D you want me to turn the tape off? (Tape off)

Mr. Norris: When the war ended we were on northern Okinawa getting ready for the invasion of Japan. The Marines were to all land in Tokyo Bay. The Marines were to go North and the Army go south. Well, when they dropped the Atomic bomb it ended the war. So they sent us, the 1st Marine Division to north China. The communists call it Beijing now. I got to be in the honor guard when the Japanese surrendered. There were seven Japanese generals that came in there to sign the papers and they signed them. They had a table there and they surrendered their saber. That's a horrible disgrace to surrender, but they laid them on the table. Then they played the Marine Corps' Hymn to march them away. One day I went in a Chinese hotel and got a hair cut. I thought that guy was never going to get done. I looked in the mirror and he had finger waves all over my head. Well, I went outside, and of course there were rickshaws every place and I motioned to one and said, "To the DD." Well, he knew that was a big fancy restaurant. I went right down to the rest room. I was combing my hair and five women walked along behind me to some stools, and down with their

pants and they all used the same rest room. I didn't smoke and I didn't drink. Didn't drink beer. There was some reason they would get great big boxes of stuff in for the bellows and there were a lot of cigarettes in there. Nobody wanted a Philip Morris cigarette. I don't know anything about them. Well, I'd take the Philip Morris for myself and pretty soon I could trade them for anything. Those guys ran out of cigarettes and they'd trade. One time I wound up with a bunch of oranges and 36 bottles of Coke. Well, then when there wasn't any combat going on, they had movies when it got dark. I came back to my tent one time and they had set up a PX and you could buy a can of pork and beans for a nickle. I ate a can of pork and beans and drank two bottles of that warm coke – if I didn't get sick! It was awful. Like a guy said one time, he thought he was going to die and when he got sick he was afraid he wouldn't. They told a lot of them, "You'll smoke before you go home." But I never did.

Mr. Misenhimer: Where were you when the war ended in Germany?

Mr. Norris: We were on Okinawa.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you get an announcement there?

Mr. Norris: Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you all celebrate or anything?

Mr. Norris: You know, I've thought of that so many times. It came over the PA system that they had surrendered. We had just eaten

breakfast. They had a mess hall set up on northern Okinawa and that came over the PA system. I heard maybe a couple of guys holler. We were getting ready for the invasion of Japan and this one guy by the name of Baylog, he was a character. We were in tents then. He asked the corpsman, "Do you have anything for a laxative?" They look like buckshot, a little black pill. I'd taken one of them one time and it was awful. I said, "Take two." And that crazy guy asked for four. Well, of course there was a staging area and they had movies at night. Well, that night it was "Four Jills and a Jeep." I'd seen it two or three times and this guy from Detroit, we decided we'd stay back and we'd fix us up a little lantern some way so we could write letters. We said, "We'll have the coffee ready when the show is over." Well, before the corpsman left, he got five more of those pills. We had the coffee all done and we set our canteens in a semi-circle and put those five in that guy's coffee canteen. I'll never forget the next morning. This Baylog, like I told you they all called me Buck, he's laying there in his cot and he says, "Buck, could you bring me a cup of coffee? I'm too weak to go." It cleaned him out. Oh, mercy. There's a lot funny things and a lot of things so pitiful.

Mr. Misenhimer: When did the fighting in Okinawa get over?

Mr. Norris: It was in August. I don't remember the date. I know we

slept on the ground. For three months and a half, just slept out there like animals. All but one nigh when we got up to Shuri Castle. You've heard of that? Well, this Vech as we called him – Shuri Castle had been shelled and there was a hole in the second floor. It rained all night. He had gone up and stretched his poncho over that, but he laid chunks of concrete around to hold it. Well, the next morning we were getting ready to go and move on, and he went up to get his poncho. It had rained all night and it had sunk down in the middle. There was probably two or three gallons of water in his poncho. He was taking these cement chunks off and all of a sudden – poof. It hit the Lieutenant right in the back. Vech had his gear laying down there, his packs. “Oh, my gear,” he said. And the Lieutenant said, “Your gear, hell.” Well his name was DelaVech, and the Lieutenant's was Russo. I remember somebody standing in back of me said, “It's a good thing they are both dagos.” I went to see that Lieutenant after I was in the Sheriff's office. One of the fellows got married. He lived in Iowa. This Lieutenant was from Dubuque. My wife and I and our little girl went to the wedding. We stayed in a hotel there in Dubuque. This fellow lived in a little town close there and this Russo, the Lieutenant, he was an attorney up there.. Well, I found where his office was and went in. I asked the girl out in front and I heard somebody in the back, “Hey, it's Buck!” He recognized my voice. Here he comes

running out, grabbed me with both arms. When we went back to Peleliu for the 50th anniversary, there was a fellow there with a movie camera. I got to talking to him and it was this Lieutenant's son. I talked to him a while. I was telling him some stories about his dad. His dad had cancer so bad he couldn't make it. He asked his son to go and take his movie camera, and it had sound on it, and he wanted me to give a fire order. I was getting ready and I looked and here come a fellow that had been in the mortar platoon. Dog Biscuit we always called him. I said, "Wait a minute till Dog Biscuit gets here." And I gave a fire order, just like it was real. He took it back and played it for his Dad. He didn't live too long after that.

Mr. Misenhimer: When you went back to Peleliu, what was it like there then?

Mr. Norris: Oh mercy. There were trees out there on the airport.

Mr. Misenhimer: Do the Japanese have it now, or who has it?

Mr. Norris: Well, that's part of what they call the Palau Islands.

Mr. Misenhimer: You mentioned how clean the Japanese were.

Mr. Norris: Oh yes. They don't throw any trash out. They are a lot better than we are. I know when we were getting ready to come home and we were up there on the island of Coror and waiting on the plane. Those Japanese are mostly small people. Well, there stood this oriental man who was about 6'3". I had a cap on that said 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines on it. He looked a little bit and here he

came. He had a cap on. He took my cap off, put it on and he put his cap on my head. Then he jabbered to this woman and he wanted her to take our picture. He couldn't speak English, but she could. And he was one of the Japanese that defended that island. I asked her to ask him where he was stationed. She jabbered at him and she said, "He said, all over." I've often wondered, we might have shot at one another you know, he walked up to one Marine to shake hands with him, and that Marine turned his back on him. I didn't see any sense in that. Anyway, she took our picture and I put my arm around him on his shoulder.

Mr. Misenhimer: When the fighting on Okinawa got over with, did you stay there for a while?

Mr. Norris: Yes, we were there about six weeks.

Mr. Misenhimer: Where were you when Japan surrendered?

Mr. Norris: On Okinawa.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you have a celebration then?

Mr. Norris: No, hardly knew it.

Mr. Misenhimer: I heard all the ships fired all their guns and everything.

Mr. Norris: I don't remember anything.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you see any kamikaze planes hit the ships while you were there?

Mr. Norris: In Okinawa. The one that aimed at our ship, the anti-aircraft got him before he hit us. They told us that they taught those kids to fly and never taught them how to land. And this one

kid, he got his plane down in the ocean before he hit a ship and they fished him out and he was 13 years old. But that one that tried to hit our ship, they blew him up before he hit it.

Mr. Misenhimer: After the war was over and you were on Okinawa, where did you go from there?

Mr. Norris: To North China. Went on LSTs. Slow things!

Mr. Misenhimer: They call those "Large Slow Targets,"

Mr. Norris: I know when we got there, they called it the Yellow River. I don't know what the Chinese call it, but I know we landed there. We went in and boy did those Chinese give us a welcome. They had little United States flags and waved them. We got on a train and it took us into Chin-San or Beijing now. I've often wondered. They talk about that Tiananmen Square, because we had a division parade. At that time it was a British race track. That city was divided in sections. It was French section, a British section, German section, and we headed out to that British race track and the division parade. I've often wondered if that's what they call Tiananmen Square now. I don't know.

Mr. Misenhimer: What all did you do in China?

Mr. Norris: Oh, we'd have close order drill in the morning and guys would go up town. Those girls never got any of my money. That one place, there were 25 girls there. They gave them a physical, 24 of them had gonorrhea and syphilis. Man, some of those guys were

crazy to get up town.

Mr. Misenhimer: What was the purpose of your being in China?

Mr. Norris: Well, it was a mess because at that time they had the Chinese Communists, the Chinese Nationalists and the Marines and the Japanese. There would be a fight once in a while. Well, that's another thing that happened. I never can remember why, but I got the job of being in charge of regimental laundry. They built a place for the Chinese to do our laundry. One rest room. We went over there one morning to get the laundry and coming back – and that street there in Beijing, I'll bet it was four or five times wider than Main Street in Rochester. That was a solid mass of people. The Chinese had rioted against the Japanese and this guy driving that old 10 wheeler, he would go about 2 or 3 miles an hour trying to get through that crowd. I looked down once and right beside the truck there are four or five Chinese men that had a Japanese down and I mean they were working him over. Beating on him – one of those Chinamen looked up at me and he motioned for me to come down and get in on the fight. That Jap kept fighting around and he got loose and he took off down an alley, and I mean that guy was in road gear. He was getting out of there. We got back over there and they sent two companies of Marines up there. In about two hours you couldn't find a Chinaman. With those V-formations with rifles and bayonets, well, I had gone in the front door of that

French building and there stood a Chinaman. The corpsman was working on a wound in his back. He had a gash, I don't know, it was three or four inches long. Some Marine stuck him with a bayonet. The Colonel was standing up there, the one I never cared for, and he said, "The next time somebody tells that SOB to move, he'll move." That corpsman was patching him up.

Mr. Misenhimer: Were you disarming the Japanese or rounding them up? Sending them back?

Mr. Norris: Yes, sent them back to Japan. A fellow from Akron was in the Marine Corps. Stout or Gast was his last name. He hadn't written to his Mother for quite a while and she wrote to this buddy of mine and asked if he'd seen him. Well, he had been on one of those reparation ships and he couldn't write. They were escorting them back to Japan.

Mr. Misenhimer: How long were you in China?

Mr. Norris: Six months.

Mr. Misenhimer: Where did you go from there?

Mr. Norris: Let's see. San Diego, California. Came back on a ship. I'll never forget. The same ship I was on. Some of those guys got those "Dear John" letters. He'd gotten one from his wife and wanted a divorce. There's some way or another they couldn't divorce a guy in the service unless he signed some release papers, but she'd sent him the papers. I'll always remember he was from

Kansas. He'd bought a nickle plated revolver there in Beijing. He'd polish that thing every day. No ammunition in it. One day he told me, "When I get home I'm going to knock on the front door, I'm going to run around to the back door, and when that SOB comes out, I'm going to kill him." I often wondered if he did. Another kid, that was on Guadalcanal, the Lieutenant hollered at me, "Buck. Get three or four guys to go and get some "C" rations." Well I sent a kid there. He was in the mortar platoon. I said, "Sisk." He said, "Come again, I don't do that stuff." Well, you don't do that in the Marine Corps. I started for him and he jumped up and ran and got it. One time on Okinawa later on, I happened to be back at the battery and we had mail call and he was sitting on a gun pit. Those mortars sat in a hole. He was sitting on the edge of that gun pit reading a letter. All of a sudden he began to cry. Got a "Dear John" letter from his wife. Sent him these papers to sign and she told him in the letter that she was pregnant by a sailor. That evening they couldn't find him. Well, the Lieutenant sent a search party out and he had gone down to the beach and killed himself. I don't know, the stuff that has happened in my life...

Mr. Misenhimer: When did you get back to San Diego?

Mr. Norris: It was January the 13th.

Mr. Misenhimer: Of '46?

Mr. Norris: Yes. I know because my little girl was born – that was her

birthday. She died when she was two months old.

Mr. Misenhimer: What year was she born in?

Mr. Norris: I think '41.

Mr. Norris: So before you went overseas. So when you got back to San Diego, what happened?

Mr. Norris: Well, they sent us back out there where we had taken boot camp and there was a guy from Knox, Edward Ruff. We just carried our junk in and sat down and here he came running in and said, "Get your gear together. I got us a plane." I don't know where we went. We went to some airport and it was a freight plane, no heater in it. They gave each one of us two blankets. Man, that was cold up there. We flew into Ulysses, Kansas. Traded planes for the next hop. We flew into O'Hare in Chicago. I remember we got off – there were corn fields around that airport up there. We got on a street car and I went to pay the guy and he said, "Oh, you guys don't pay." I was carrying that Japanese rifle and bayonet and a sea bag. Everybody was gawking and looking at us.

Mr. Misenhimer: When did you get out?

Mr. Norris: I lost my records in China. I know I was home for a month and had to go clear back to San Francisco. What did they call that island? There was a prison there for a while?

Mr. Misenhimer: Alcatraz?

Mr. Norris: Yes. Well, anyway I was back out there. I spent a month

before they got squared around before I could get my discharge.

Mr. Misenhimer: Maybe it was Mare Island? Mare Island Naval Base?

Mr. Norris: I believe it was. I know I spent a month out there. I got the job of night clerk. If you could call it a job. Sleep in the office and answer the telephone if it rang. In the morning I'd call the operator when I went to bed and tell her to call me at a certain time. She'd call me on the PA system. Get the guys up. I remember one guy. He was from Florida. I don't remember his name now. He was married and had a daughter. He'd met some woman in California and these passes they'd give them. I got so I fixed them up. You were supposed to be back at a certain time. Well I put them in the typewriter and changed the date and the time. He'd stay with his girl friend all night. He told me one time he went out to see her and she had a husband that was a wounded Marine in the hospital. He got there and there was a lady that stayed with her too. The lady that owned the place, her husband, I don't know what happened. He'd had an operation. But she stayed all night so he just slept with the other lady that night.

Mr. Misenhimer: When did you finally get discharged then?

Mr. Norris: It was in April. I was home nine days before the primary. There was nine servicemen running for Sheriff and I was the only Marine and I made it.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you get any ribbons or medals?

Mr. Norris: I got the Good Conduct Medal and then there is another one.
I can't think what that was

Mr. Misenhimer: Purple Heart or anything?

Mr. Norris: I should have had three Purple Hearts. I never got any.
I've got a scar on my back, but you don't pay any attention to it.
All I wanted to do was get home.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you stay in the reserves or anything?

Mr. Norris: No, you know the jail was right across from the Post Office
and I lived at the jail when I was Sheriff. The recruiter from South
Bend came down to the post office and it was on Tuesdays. He was
always wanting me to sign up in the reserves. And I told him,
"Well, the next time I'm in South Bend I will." But I just never did.
And that was the first group that they sent to Korea.

Mr. Misenhimer: What was it like on Okinawa at the reunion?

Mr. Norris: Beautiful. I took four of those cameras that you just send
the camera in and the 4th one I laid down some place and went off
and left it. I had my picture taken. There was a bunch of young
people that came in. I don't know where they were from, but they
came from mainland Japan. There were two girls together in their
bikini bathing suits and one of them took my picture with the other
girl. I don't know what ever happened to the camera. I miss it.

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