

## Dale Barker Oral History Monologue

DALE BARKER: I was born in Pensacola, Florida on October 18th, 1919. I was the oldest in a family of three boys and we grew up in several southern states. I graduated from high school in 1936 in the little town of Adairsville, Georgia. I couldn't find work so I joined the CCC and for two and a half years I worked in Northern California on the Modoc National Forest. After that I worked as a Silver Service Clerk at Mare Island Navy Yard in Vallejo, California. I was cashier of the Bank of Adairsville. And I worked as a typist for a graduate student at the University of Georgia.

I enlisted in the Marine Corps in May of 1942. After boot camp at Parris Island they sent me to Radio Operator and Materiel Schools in New York, New River, North Carolina and Washington, D.C. for a total of about 15 months. I came out a staff sergeant. I had a brief furlough home and then I was sent to Camp Pendleton in California and pretty soon was assigned to the First Armored Amphibian Battalion. I was to be Communications Chief in the, in B Company of the battalion. I didn't know what Armored

Amphibians were and neither did anyone recruited into that outfit. But it turned out, Armored Amphibian were amphibious tanks, also called Amtanks or LVTAs, for Landing Vehicles Tracked Armored.

There was another important tracked vehicle -- the Amphibious Tractor, otherwise called Amtrack. The two vehicles, Amtanks and Amtracks should not be confused with each other. Both were designed for assault from the sea and across coral reefs and on the hostile beaches. But our tanks had a turret and more firepower. Our job was the blast the beaches.

The Amtanks job was to transport troops and materiel across the reef and deposit them on shore. Both these tracked vehicles were needed because Pacific islands were usually ringed with coral reefs extending a half mile or more from the shore -- except at very high tides, boats could not deliver assault troops to the beach. They could bring them no closer than the edge of the reef.

That first model of our tanks was equipped with a 37mm cannon and 430 caliber machine guns. It required a crew

of seven men. Because each tank had a radio, one of those seven men was a trained radio operator. It was my job to coordinate the radio and other communications for B Company in the battalion.

The primary mission of Armored Amphibians was beach assault. At sea we were usually transported on LSTs. That stands for Landing Ship Tank. But once we traveled on LSTs and another time on LSMs. (clears throat) In a landing our tanks would be barked before dawn through the bow doors of the LSTs, as much as two miles at sea. We were forming up at a line of departure, the Navy would be bombarding shore targets and planes would be bombing and striking the beaches. The last Naval vessels to fire on the beaches were little LCIs, did the edge of the reef, armed with cannons and rockets.

We would pass between the LCIs, climb onto the reef and take up firing where the LCIs left off. We would proceed toward the beach, firing at whatever targets presented themselves. Behind us came the first and succeeding waves of Amtracks loaded with Marine infantry. We would continue our fire in order to keep the Japs heads down

until the Amtracks could deposit their troops on the beach in positions of greatest advantage.

The first Armored Amphibian battalion was activated at Camp Pendleton in August of 1943, less than four months before we were ship out overseas. Training was very intense. We were the first battalion of our kind. The Marine Corps had actually had only three Amtank battalions in the entire war. And neither the Navy nor the Marine Corps, you just had to use, or what to do with this new weapon, the Amtank. Our battalion commander, Major Louis Metzger worked hard to prepare us and our untried vehicles for combat in the short time available.

On January 1st, 1944 we loaded on LSTs in San Diego and did practice landings on San Clemente, an island off the coast of California. These maneuvers were a disaster. The weather turned bad, the seas were rough and the LST skippers didn't know what to do with our strange vehicles. Several tanks sank and one man, his name was Sergeant Struthers, was lost at sea when his tank went down.

We made repairs and received replacements and then on January 6th we sailed for our first combat, the invasion of [Rawendemor?] -- two islands of Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshalls. That operation began on January 31st and was soon over. For two days of landings we led troops of the 4th Marine Division, according to plan. On the first day, however, the surf was fearsome. Several of our 16-ton tanks were flipped right over and we lost more men to drowning than to enemy action. Kwajalein was considered a light operation and the casualties were light. The battalion and its surviving Amtanks boarded LSDs and were taken by way of Funafuti to Guadalcanal. There we built a camp in the jungle at Tetera Beach and spent four months training for our next operation.

So far I've told who we were and about our first invasion. Now I'll focus on the Marianas and provide more detail on our landings there. On May 12th, 1944 we began rehearsal landings on Guadalcanal beaches, with the 3rd Marine Division and the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade. They went on for, almost constantly for two weeks, till May 25th. What was lacking to make these maneuvers realistic

was a coral reef. There were no reefs on those Guadalcanal beaches.

We stood out to sea on May 31st and soon learned that the next invasions would be Saipan, Kenya and Guam in the Marianas. Invasion of Saipan was set for June 15th, with the 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions. We were to serve as floating reserves for the Saipan operation and then land on Guam three days later, on June 18th. We didn't know how much the Japanese would upset that schedule. For staging, we laid over for three days at Kwajalein, already by then a major American base. Thousands of men and hundreds of ships were gathered there from Guadalcanal, Hawaii, California and other parts of the Pacific.

By June 15th we were in waters east of Saipan, acting as reserves. Twice on June 15th and June 17th our convoys were attacked by Jap torpedo bombers. Several Jap planes were shot down, but the only loss in our convoys was an LCI damaged so severely it had to be sunk.

We didn't keep our date to land on Guam. The Japanese fleet came out of the Philippines in an effort to break up

the Saipan invasion. What happened for them was a disaster in the Philippine Sea at the hands of Admiral Mark Mitscher's carrier planes. The downing of 243 Jap planes on June 19th came to be known as the Great Marianas Turkey Shoot.

But the schedule had been disrupted. The Japanese naval challenge, a stiff resistance on Saipan kept us on tap as reserves. We weren't relieved of that assignment until about the end of June. Our convoys kept going back and forth in Saipan waters for two weeks. Some of our men said we were plowing a rut in the Pacific. LSTs were running low on fuel, water and food. Meals got pretty bad. The men had been aboard crowded ships for more than a month and it was hard not to get restless. The LSTs weren't designed as troop carriers and they had no quarters for our people, only for the crew, their own crew. We slept where we could. Most of us either topside on the weather deck or down on the tank deck.

We were all ordered back to Enewetak in the Marshalls for restaging. There the ships refueled and re-provisioned and we were allowed to go ashore briefly for exercise on

some of the little bare Atoll Islands. On July 15th we left Enewetak on our way back to the Marianas. The men spent their time cleaning weapons, belting ammunition, washing clothes, playing cards or just talking. On July 20th, the day before the landings on Guam, we were allowed fresh water showers.

Our battle plan must be familiar to everyone acquainted with Guam history. Two separate simultaneous assaults were made. One on the beaches near the village of Asan, by the 3rd Marine Division -- the other near the village of Agat by the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade. The Army's 77th Division was assigned initially to act as floating reserve. Amtanks from our C and D Companies plus three Amtanks from our H&S Company led the attack on the Asan beaches. Amtanks from our A&B Companies led the attack on the Agat beaches.

Friday, July 21st was officially called "L Day" or Love Day. Reveille aboard the LSTs was at 0200, whether you'd slept or not. On LST 220, where I was, breakfast was at 0345 and the cook served us steak and eggs. Not all ships



did that, but we were glad to get a hearty, hot meal since it might be our last for some time.

The LST bow doors opened and at 0730 our Amtanks lumbered forward, eased down the ramp and plunged into the water. As our Amtanks moved slowly toward the line of departure, we could see the battleships and cruisers launching huge shells at targets onshore. Planes were already bombing and striking the beaches.

Since I was not a regular Amtank crewman, I was assigned to act as radio operator on B Company's maintenance tractor, D Zero. We had mechanics and medical corpsmen and of course, spare parts onboard that tractor. Our job was to repair stalled tanks, if possible, pull tanks out of traps, rescue troops from damaged tanks, etc. I was to do radio maintenance as it was needed.

At 0800 the Navy gave the signal and all of our Armored Amphibious churned toward the reef. We passed between the LCIs with their cannons booming and their rockets whooshing. Shells from our big war ships passed over our heads to hit targets ashore. It was very noisy. D

Company tanks were on the left heading for beaches designated Red 1 and Red 2 near [Attaloop?] Point. C Company on the right -- targeted Green Beach and Blue Beach, the Ascent Point. Our D Company's second and third platoons advanced straight ahead, but the first platoon took up positions on the left to fire on that loop point.

Similarly, C Company deployed one platoon to the right, to fire on Ascent Point. In our maintenance tractor we followed the tanks, but pulled off the one side. The first wave of amphibious tractors, loaded with Marine infantrymen, followed behind us. The 3rd Marines behind D Company, the 9th and 22nd Marines behind C Company.

Right away everybody came under fire. Most of our second and third platoon Amtanks made it to the beach all right and moved inland, firing at snipers and other targets. Those Amtanks with the troops that made it ashore unloaded their men and headed back out to sea for more troops. But several of the Amtracks didn't make it. They were hit by fire from Attaloop Point and were knocked out or destroyed and the men in them either killed or wounded.

Our first platoon covering our left flank was hard hit by a Jap 75 mm guns firing down from Attaloop Point. Tanks D2, D3 and D5 were knocked out. We evacuated the crews of D2 and D5, but only some of the D3 men got out. That Amtank burned all day with the bodies of three men in it, [Lybarger?], King and [Sidnick?]. Two other 1st platoon men, Manfred and [Gustopolis?] also died in the landing. Seven wounded men were evacuated to hospital ships. Six of those never came back.

In D Zero we made several trips into the beach to retrieve disabled tanks. And I had to repair the radio on Lt. MacDowell's tank, D16. He was our company commander. Very soon the reef was strewn with wrecked Amtanks and Amtracks and dead Marines. C Company on our right flank was catching the same kind of hell.

Not more than 10 days later did we learn that in the assault on beaches down at Agat, A and B Companies, especially A Company, lost more men and tanks than we did, mostly to devastating fire from Gun Point, [Bangy?] Point and Yoni Island. Captain Lilly, the A Company commander, was one of those killed.

Once the amphibious assault was completed, our main mission was over. From that time on we would make minor follow up landings but for the most part we would do beach defense against counterattacks or infiltration from the sea. Through much of the afternoon of that first day we sat in our vehicles out on the reef watching the Marine infantrymen in the bloody business of trying to take the [Chunita?] Cliffs behind the beach.

At about 1500, D Zero moved onto the beach into the area occupied by the 2nd Platoon, where they were deploying their tanks for beach defense. We dug foxholes right in front of our vehicles; that is between the vehicles and the reef. A very strange night followed. The enemy laid down artillery and mortar fire all around us. The big ships at sea fired 16-inch rounds over our heads to targets inland, sounding like freight cars passing overhead. Other ships fired flares to light up the whole beach area and the high ground behind it. Mortar rounds falling in the 2nd Platoon area killed Murphy, a machine gunner and wounded six others, all from tanks D9 and D10.

On the second day, our 3rd Platoon joined C Company to lead an assault on Cabras Island, near Piti. D Zero and most of the Amtanks moved back out onto the reef, where we could watch the desperate efforts of the Marines still trying to seize the high ground of [Chanito?] Cliff. That night a Marine artillery unit set up near us on the beach and the Jap mortar barrage seemed lighter than in the night before.

In the next several days we did beach defense at night and repaired out tanks, radios and weapons in daytime. Lt. MacDowell went out on one tank to retrieve the three bodies from Amtank D3. We and our Amtanks were used some to carry cargo and sometimes to support minor infantry advances, though our armor was not really adequate for land tank action. After about six days hostilities had moved inland and northward away from the Asan beaches. Also our route to peninsula was sealed off or secured and our Asan and Agat beachheads were joined. Some of our tanks operated with the infantry and they pushed toward Agana.

Well, Thursday, July 27th, I moved south with most of C and D Companies to a location near Piti. There we rejoined A and B Companies and set up a temporary battalion camp. We cannibalized tank and radio parts and wrecked tanks to keep our surviving tanks in as near combat condition as we could. Between the Piti camp and the Agana area, we maintained radio contact with our Amtank crews working with the infantry up there. We learned on July 31st that Agana had been taken without much opposition and our Amtank units had set up a forward camp on a ball diamond there.

On August the 1st, two other Marines and I took a Jeep ride to Agana and were astonished, not to say aghast, at the incredible wreckage there. A Seabee camp was close to our camp near Piti; always ingenious, those fellows were. They had somehow rigged showers with showerheads made of tin cans with holes punched in the bottoms. We got our first fresh water shower since the landing. Till then we had washed and shaved only in seawater or in muddy rainwater from shell holes.

Civilians began to gather at our camp near Piti. They were very friendly and seemed glad to see U.S. Forces back on Guam. Two adventurous, friendly, teenage Chamorro boys named Ramon and Cecil spent time in the camp eating field rations we offered them and telling us of their experiences. I have no authority, other than their word, but one of them told us that prior to the Japanese invasion, Chamorro parents usually gave their children Spanish names. But during the Japanese occupation, they began to bestow English names. They also told us, as I understood it, that if a married couple were both American, the Japanese would ship them both to Japan as prisoners of war. If an American man were married to a Chamorro woman, only the husband went. But if an American woman was married to a Chamorro man, both would remain on Guam. Despite extensive reading, I've never seen any confirmation of their story, but I thought it interesting.

On Sunday, August the 6th, the whole battalion moved to set up a camp at Agat. We learned there how much heavier A and B Company losses had been than ours. I remember the Agat camp vividly, for its rain and mud, the many wrecked Amtanks and Amtracks; they used some material for war

dead, in the persistent stench of dead bodies. Half of the battalion it seemed fell victim to dengue and dysentery.

On Saturday, August the 11th, John Evans, a radio maintenance man and I hitched a ride out on Orote Peninsula to look for copper wire for our antennas. We were told that some concrete foundations we saw there were all that remained of pre-war Marine barracks. We also saw children and other civilians gathered there. Later that day Lt. MacDowell told us we would be leaving Guam the next day.

On Sunday, August the 12th, the battalion broke camp and boarded LSTs. All the Amtanks and other vehicles still operational and all the men. I remember how sick some of them were. All of D Company plus some vehicles and crews from an Amtracks battalion were loaded onto LST 24, manned by a U.S. Coast Guard crew. We left Guam at 1730 that day. The total American casualties for the Guam operation came to more than 1700 killed and about 6000 wounded. In our Amtank battalion we lost 31 killed and over 60 wounded. The return to Guadalcanal took 15 days,



including a layover at Enewetak of about two or three days. For the able-bodied men onboard it was a rather pleasant trip, on an un-crowded, well-provisioned ship. I was doing okay. But not everybody. The sick bays were full of men afflicted with dengue. They recovered gradually, however, and felt reasonably good by the time we reached Guadalcanal.

Our second stay on Guadalcanal lasted about five months, in which time we received a new Amtank model. The LVT-A4 replaced the old LVT-A1. Instead of the 37mm cannon, it had a 75mm Howitzer mounted in an open turret. This not only gave us more firepower, but made possible a new mission. Beach assault would remain our primary mission, but we would also be able to operate as artillery.

Even before the new tanks arrived in November 1944, men were in classes learning about engines, armor, weapons, radios and everything else on the new Amtank. I was sent with several other radio maintenance men from Guadalcanal to Banika, an island in the Russell Group of the Solomons, to learn about the new radios.

After large-scale naval and troop maneuvers in Guadalcanal waters, we left Guadalcanal the last time on March 12th, 1945, bound for Okinawa. In this report about the Marianas, I shan't describe in any detail our operations in the Okinawa campaign. The Japanese General elected not to defend the beaches. Now our landings were unopposed. We engaged primarily in artillery and beach defense and by all accounts we were very effective. We were used first in the northern parts of the island and then in the south. We moved often, digging new foxholes, under fire much of the time and living in rain and mud. Okinawa lasted three months. For us that was from April 1st, 1945 to July 4th.

After that we had a new rear area, Saipan, much different from Guadalcanal. The 1st Armored Amphibian Battalion arrived from Okinawa, some on July 10th, some on July 11th, 1945. I remember I was aboard LST 530 as it stood offshore, along north of Tanapag Harbor, when I saw B-29s in flight for the first time. The LSTs opened their bow doors and disgorged the tanks and their crews and we chugged ashore. There we found a tent camp already in place, if not quite finished.

Saipan was quite a change after Guadalcanal. We were still in tents and on a beach, but no jungle. In fact, no trees. The tents had wooden floors, not bare dirt. We soon set in to complete and improve the camp. Men brought in crushed coral to pave the company streets. We built mess halls, a recreation tent, an outdoor theater with a real screen, a ball diamond, a volleyball court, showers and heads. Some tents were equipped as offices, some for the work of supply, ordinance, tank maintenance and other activities. In D Company I supervised the equipping of the Communications tent, setting up a radio and public speaker system and setting up telephone service.

The big B-29 bombers flying to and from Japan were a fascinating sight to us. A lot of the men made trips when they were on liberty to Isley Airfield, just to see the big planes take off and land. Saipan, by that time, was a major military label and air base, bustling with activity in preparation for the invasion of Japan.

Immediately adjacent to our camp was a powerful radio transmitting station devoted fulltime to Japanese language propaganda broadcasts to Japan. In our radio tent we were

startled to discover that we could put on a set of earphones and hear the voices of the announcers, even when the earphones weren't plugged into any radio receiving equipment. When we went to the battalion theater for movies, the broadcast could be heard on the speaker until the movie started and then the movie soundtrack overrode that signal.

We soon went back to work training for combat and maintaining the Amtanks and other equipment. Some new tanks came in to replace our Okinawa losses. We stayed very busy in the Radio tent preparing and installing radios. But we were also allowed more liberty time for rest and recovery from Okinawa. There was more recreation and entertainment to be found on Saipan than we ever had on Guadalcanal. If the movie in our camp didn't suit, there were movies and stage shows in other units not far away. Hollywood stars and other entertainers came to Saipan.

We were still training in early August for the invasion of Japan when we heard of the first and then the second atomic bombs on Japanese cities we had never heard of. We

couldn't really believe it, but some began to hope that maybe the war would end soon. At midnight following August the 10th, I heard voices outside my tent. Right away we turned on all the radio sets in the battalion to hear that the Japanese wanted to surrender, provided the emperor could be saved. Absolutely no one regarded that as an obstacle, if it meant the end of the war.

Most of us opened bottles of beer or Coca-Cola and sat up for a long time talking. On August the 15th, in mid-morning, the battalion commander announced the surrender and that the next day would be a holiday. We had no real perception of the terrible effects of the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We knew that now there would be no bloody invasion of Japan and that we could go home.

For about two and a half months after V.J. Day we marked time on Saipan waiting for shipping to take us back to the States. An elaborate point system was instituted to set priorities for leaving. A few 85-pointers, pre-war veterans, veterans of Guadalcanal and some others were the first to leave. With three and a half years service, 21 months overseas and three invasions, I had 74 points to my

credit. So like most of the men, I waited for shipping and for the critical point score to come down.

Just to keep the men occupied and from getting restless, schedules of rather unproductive activities were mandated, such as hikes, classes and organized sports. Some of the classes were directed toward readjustment to civilian life. About this time I learned that I had been promoted to Tech Sergeant. Movie stars toured the island and once Peggy Ryan and Eddie Bracken, two young, popular movie stars visited our camp. Because I had access to the company typewriter and could type, I prepared a document of 20 or so pages listing names of men, names of places and a simple chronology of the battalion's time overseas.

On October 5th a typhoon struck Saipan, destroying our recreation tent and the theater and killing a B Company man. Through October we gradually dismantled the battalion, transferring the Amtanks and all other materiel to service units. On November 2nd most of us boarded the troop ship *USS Griggs* and left Saipan bound for home. We arrived in San Diego on November 15th and were quartered for a few days at Camp Pendleton. From there men were

transferred, most of our troop train, to other stations for discharge or reassignment.

The 1st Armored Amphibian Battalion was deactivated on November 30th, 1945 and ceased to exist. The 1st Armored was in very active service for 27 months and 12 days between August of 1943 through November 1945. We had operated overseas 22 and a half months, six months of that time afloat and 16 and a half months ashore on islands. We had led landings in three invasions -- Kwajalein, Guam and Okinawa.

In many ways we were very fortunate in having a light casualty rate. Kwajalein was a light operation. Guam gave us our heaviest losses. The Japanese decision not to defend against initial beach assault saved us from heavy casualties on Okinawa. By the Marine Corps' three Armored Amphibian Battalions, we probably suffered the fewest casualties. The 2nd Armored was hard hit at Iwo Jima, the third Armored at Peleliu. The Marine infantry always had it worse than amphibious units like ours. Armored Amphibians and amphibious tractors both came into

existence in World War II to cope with the problem of coral reefs. The Amtanks did passed into history.

Since World War II other amphibious vehicles of different design have served other purposes. Today if reefs were an obstacle, helicopter gun ships would simply fly over them. Some to the fire on targets below, some to transport troops. I was discharged at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina on December 7th, 1945.

I took advantage of the G.I. Bill and entered Georgia Tech in Atlanta in February of 1946 as an electrical engineering student. Like many veterans, I went to school 12 months a year and finished four academic years in three calendar years. To supplement my G.I. Bill support, I took a job in the Georgia Tech Library. I found the library work more congenial than engineering and decided to become a university librarian. At first I thought I would specialize in scientific and technical libraries.

In the school year of 1949 and '50, I took a master's in Library Science at the University of Illinois. Also in that year I courted a classmate, Caroline Jones from



Tennessee and we were married between semesters.

Returning to Atlanta, I worked in the Georgia Tech Library for 16 years, becoming Associate Director of Libraries.

Caroline worked at the Emory University Library and became a department head there. Our first daughter was born in 1953. We returned to Illinois in 1959 and '60 where I met the resident requirements for the Ph.D. Our second daughter was born that year. After receiving the doctorate I moved from Georgia Tech to the University of Georgia and served there for two and a half years as a library systems analyst.

In 1969 I moved our family to Miami, where I became Associate Director of the University of Miami Library. Caroline became a department head at the Florida International University Library, also in Miami. I retired in 1990 and when we decided to move back to Atlanta, Caroline retired in 1992. We live in Atlanta now.

The members of the 1st Armored began in 1977 to hold annual reunions. Since the men had come from almost all

the states, reunions were held in various part of the country -- east to west, north to south. In the best years over 100 men would attend, many of them with their wives. With the passing years, we are more likely now to have 70 or 80 men in attendance. The first reunion I attended with the 15th in Tampa in 1991. That's when I got "in trouble" as I like to say. I took out the old chronology I had assembled on Saipan, edited for easier reading, made photocopies and distributed copies to the D Company men who were present at that reunion.

An interest had developed in producing a history of the battalion and because of my little chronology, I was considered suitable for the job. I completed the work at the end of 1995 and called it *Hitting the Beaches*. The book was actually an anthology of reminiscences contributed by several dozen of the men who sent me their recollections, diaries, photos and documents. Every word was written by a 1st Armored man. We printed 1000 copies and at the present time have only 175 left. The book was written primarily for members of the battalion and their families and they have responded by usually buying several

copies each, for a total of 680 copies so far. Over 160 other copies have been sold to non-members.

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