

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

Center for Pacific War Studies
Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview with
Albert R. Schlemmer, Sr.

August 11, 2002

Interview With

Mr. Albert R. Schlemmer, Sr.

Mr. Richard Misenhimer

Today is August 11, 2002. I am interviewing Mr. Albert R. Schlemmer, Sr. His home address is 10497 New Biddinger Road, Harrison, Ohio, 45030-9521. This interview is taking place in the Mendana Hotel in Honiara, Guadalcanal Islands. This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War Studies for the preservation of historic information related to World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer

Al, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today. Let me ask you, when and where were you born?

Mr. Schlemmer

I was born on April 14, 1922 at Harrison, Ohio in the suburbs.

Mr. Misenhimer

And that is where you live now?

Mr. Schlemmer

That is where I live now.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you have any brothers and sisters?

Mr. Schlemmer

I had six brothers and sisters. They are all deceased.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were any of your brothers in World War II?

Mr. Schlemmer

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were they younger than you or older?

Mr. Schlemmer

Much older than me.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were your parents' names?

Mr. Schlemmer

John Schlemmer and Ethel Rockefeller.

Mr. Misenhimer

Any relation to the oil Rockefellers?

Mr. Schlemmer

Maybe an 11th cousin or so. We're related, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Distant though?

Mr. Schlemmer

From the time I was told about it until now I don't remember if it was 11th or 12th or my mother was 11th or 12th, but it is immaterial.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to school.

Mr. Schlemmer

I went to school in Harrison, Ohio and I went to school in Laferia, Texas. I went to school in Edinburgh, Texas and then back to Harrison, but finished my high school in Texas and I went to one year of college to Edinburgh Junior College.

Mr. Misenhimer

What year did you finish high school?

Mr. Schlemmer

1939.

Mr. Misenhimer

What high school was that?

Mr. Schlemmer

Edinburgh Senior High.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, you finished in 1939. What did you do when you finished high school.

Mr. Schlemmer

Well, I went the next year to the first year at Edinburgh Junior College. My parents went back and forth to Harrison. We went up for the summer, came back to Texas to go to my second year of college and my brother, who was running my father's business in Ohio called and said one of his driver's quit if I wanted to come and drive a truck for him. I got on the train and went back to Ohio on the train by myself.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your father's business?

Mr. Schlemmer

Well, besides trading anything he could buy or sell, he had a grain and coal business in Harrison, Ohio and my brothers worked for him in the wintertime and farmed in the summer for years.

Then a couple of them took it over while I was overseas.

Mr. Misenhimer

On December 7, 1941, Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor. Do you remember hearing about that and where you were?

Mr. Schlemmer

I didn't hear at first. We were at a movie in Cincinnati, some of us young men friends. We came out and got in the car. We hadn't heard anything. On the way home, probably eight o'clock in the evening, it was on the radio in the car. We went to a little coffee shop and hamburger place in Harrison. We sat around and talked and said tomorrow we will join up, four or five of us. Well, in thinking about it, four were working and that didn't sound too good, how about we work tomorrow and tell them we won't be there Tuesday. So that is what we did. We went in and they said we don't have room for you, but sign up here and come back on the fifth day of January. So we did.

Mr. Misenhimer

So on December the 9th you went down and what branch did you sign up for?

Mr. Schlemmer

Well, I put down aviation and sea duty. I ended up in the infantry.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then you came back in January and were actually sworn in.

Mr. Schlemmer

Fifth day of January.

Mr. Misenhimer

Which branch were you sworn into?

Mr. Schlemmer

The U.S. Marine Corp, not reserves.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were the regular Marines?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And did you go back home or did you go straight from there to training?

Mr. Schlemmer

Went straight to training from there. I went home, of course, from the first time.

Mr. Misenhimer

Sure

Mr. Schlemmer

We spent the night in Cincinnati. We had chow dinner chips for a Chinese restaurant. We had free tickets to go to the Gaiety Theater, which was a burlesque house. But since we lived within 20 miles of these, the four of us said we are going to do something else while we are here and all of the country boys all went to the Gaiety Theater. We went and saw Clyde McCoy at the Schubert Theater in person. That's all it was, was the band. They put us up in a little flop house that I can't remember breakfast, but I remember the supper the night before in the Chinese restaurant, because I had never eaten in a Chinese restaurant before, even though I lived that close to it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to training then?

Mr. Schlemmer

Paris Island.

Mr. Misenhimer

From Cincinnati you went straight to Paris Island?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes, but it took a while. We left on the 6th and went to Savannah, picked up some more cars of troops from the east. There already were troops from Michigan that had joined in Detroit and picked up more cars and then we went to Paris Island. They backed that train in and I had bought some 10 inch long cigars in Savannah, because I knew it was the last one I was going to have for a while. But I bought too many. When the train pulled out, at the back end the conductor was standing back there smoking one of my cigars and waving goodbye to us. From there what happened that day, I couldn't tell you anything that happened.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now you were on a troop train, of course?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now everybody on that train was going to the Marines?

Mr. Schlemmer

I couldn't say that they didn't take a car off somewhere, because we stopped to wait for the freight trains, but as far as I know every car on there went to Paris Island.

Mr. Misenhimer

And Paris Island is in North Carolina?

Mr. Schlemmer

South Carolina.

Mr. Misenhimer

What day did you arrive there?

Mr. Schlemmer

It must have been in the early morning of the 8th.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what happened when you got there?

Mr. Schlemmer

Well, like I said, I can't tell you what they did that day, but, of course, we got fitted for uniforms was probably what it was and we had buckets issued because they didn't have barracks for us. My friends that joined the reserves were in barracks and the two of us that went in the regulars had to go into tents in January. We had buckets to wash in and so forth with a little stove in the tent.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you determine to join the regulars rather than the reserves? How was that?

Mr. Schlemmer

I just figured it is going to be four years and maybe I'll make a career out of it or if I get aviation duty I'm going to learn something, maybe even if I get sea duty I'll learn something. I didn't know much about the Marine Corp.

Mr. Misenhimer

You did have a choice though?

Mr. Schlemmer

I wanted to go and be a pilot, but I wasn't big enough. I took courses at Xavier University at night about being a mechanic. I went to Los Angeles and stayed in Burbank and took a course out there in how to put rivets in. I didn't learn much, but I paid a lot of money for it.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you do this? Before you went in?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Before December 7th?

Mr. Schlemmer

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, you went to Paris Island and then got uniforms and you were in a tent. How about food, what did you get in the way of food?

Mr. Schlemmer

Oh, real good food and plenty of it. It was better than what we got at the New River when we got up there, because all the cooks at New River practically just got pushed into the job and so forth.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was some of your training there at Paris Island?

Mr. Schlemmer

Well, two weeks was practically marching and marching and marching. The sergeant giving us the lowdown on what happens. He must have had 12 years of experience. He had several stripes. He was a likeable person. The corporal was likeable. That was it for there. After two weeks, we went to the rifle range. The corporal took us and the sergeant took over another platoon. We had good food there. The only problem I had was that I was a slow eater. I had an esophagus problem, but I didn't know it yet. It took me some time to eat. The third night I didn't get out with the rest of the troops and fall in. He came back in to see what I was doing. I was sitting there eating. He said how come you're just finishing up? I said I have to eat slow, I just can't eat fast. He said you can stay as long as you're eating, but when you leave here, double time back to the barracks (we had barracks there) and report to me. The rest of those two weeks, that's what I did. I gained from 108 to 118 pounds while I was at Paris Island, because I slept at night.

Mr. Misenhimer

You only weighed 108 when you went in? I'm surprised they would take you.

Mr. Schlemmer

Well, if you could read the paper that war was declared in four inch high letters you passed the eye exam. If you could hear and speak, they took you.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you were only in tents for two weeks then?

Mr. Schlemmer

In regular Paris Island, two weeks. Two weeks at rifle range. I didn't qualify, but qualified with the bayonet. Those four weeks were over on the 8th day of February and we were at New River, tent camp at New River.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where is New River?

Mr. Schlemmer

That is across the river from Camp Lejune at Hadnot Point.

Mr. Misenhimer

And that's in North Carolina?

Mr. Schlemmer

That's in North Carolina.

Mr. Meisenheimer

You arrived there and what happened there?

Mr. Schlemmer

Not much. We had maybe two NCO's for our company. I don't think we had any officers then, but they kept dribbling in from the reserves and from Cuba and Panama and so forth until we had enough people in. The same way with Colonel Pollock. We had Major Shalfont. I don't know when he came, but Pollock, who was our Battalion Commander over here didn't come until late. Cates, our Regimental Commander, didn't come until after that. We picked up cigarette butts and maybe marched a little. We just weren't a full company, not the officers, nobody probably knew what we were going to do until Vandergriff came.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So you were already assigned to a company, is that right?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes.

Mr. Meisenheimer

What company was that?

Mr. Schlemmer

G Company, Second Battalion First Marines.

Mr. Meisenheimer

In the First Marine Division?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes. As far as I can remember, we were assigned right away.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Let me ask you a question. You see all the time about how mean the Marine drill sergeants are to recruits. Were they mean to you?

Mr. Schlemmer

No, no. They talked to some people a lot rougher than they talked to me. I was 20 years old and had been around and I knew better than to speak up. I spoke up once later on to a Corporal and I regretted it afterwards, but we became friends.

Mr. Meisenheimer

What uniform did you have at that point?

Mr. Schlemmer

We had khaki and they issued us greens if they had them to fit you. I had World War I trousers because Marines by that time were bigger than 118 pounds and I received a green jacket that had brass loops for your belt. That had to be World War I. One of the fellows that joined with me didn't go with us because they did not have a topcoat to fit him. He was a man about your size and just 20 something years old, so they sent him to the Naval Ammunition Dump when they got him a topcoat.

Mr. Meisenheimer

When you say greens, is this the dress uniform?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes.

Mr. Meisenheimer

You didn't have the fatigues at that point?

Mr. Schlemmer

We had what we called dungarees.

Mr. Meisenheimer

What color were they?

Mr. Schlemmer

Green, a soft green.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So you had the green dungarees, plus the green dress uniform?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes.

Mr. Meisenheimer

And khaki uniforms?

Mr. Schlemmer

Right.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Now the people who were reserves, were they with you also in the same unit and all that?

Mr. Schlemmer

They went right to units around me. One went to M Company, First Marines, one was a truck driver in civilian life and he went to the Pioneers. The people who were in my platoon at Parris Island almost all of them went to G Company, Mr. Bewley, Mr. Delaney who you met, joined at Cincinnati with me. They went right to G Company with me and many that were from Boston and Detroit that were in my company. We had lots of Boston men and some hillbillies we picked up somewhere on the way. I don't know what town, Knoxville maybe, and they went to the same company.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So what they were doing was actually putting together a unit? So they got people into G Company?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes.

Mr. Meisenheimer

How long did that last?

Mr. Schlemmer

Well, I know that Finnegan was probably three weeks later getting to Parris Island than we did. He calls me an old salt because my serial number is so much lower than his, but Bewley and Delaney's are right in the 345.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So your officers came in, Colonel Pollock came in and some of the others came. Was this the entire First Division there?

Mr. Schlemmer

No. I don't know at this time whether anybody else was at that point in the Fifth or Seventh, but the Seventh went overseas before us to Fiji Islands or Samoa. I don't think they were in the same camp we were in. I can't honestly answer that question, but they left first by the way of Panama Canal. We didn't learn much from our Company Commander ever. He would go to a meeting and come back and maybe he told the platoon leaders, but we were not privy to anything.

Mr. Meisenheimer

What was your company commander's name?

Mr. Schlemmer

Sherman.

Mr. Meisenheimer

What rank was he?

Mr. Schlemmer

He was a captain, a reserve captain from Boston, with no experience in Cuba or that type of thing that I know of.

Mr. Meisenheimer

And he joined your company there?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes.

Mr. Meisenheimer

When did you leave there and for where?

Mr. Schlemmer

We left there about the first of June. On the 6th day of June, we were in Amarillo or into New Mexico and President Roosevelt signed the increase in pay. I don't know when we left and I

don't know when we got there, but I remember where we were when we went from \$21 a day once a month to \$75.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Quite a jump?

Mr. Schlemmer

Especially when they took \$6.50 a month for insurance, another \$5 for your laundry. It didn't give you much to go out on for a week.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So they took all of that of your pay then?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes.

Mr. Meisenheimer

What was it, \$10,000 insurance?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So you were on a troop train going from North Carolina to the West Coast?

Mr. Schlemmer

We went down through Florida, and up through Alabama. Mr. Wilson, who was here the first two days, handed a note to somebody in Birmingham on the platform and they had it. They didn't take him away, they left him on the train, but I never saw him for a day or so and he probably got a reprimand. He lived in Alabama, so we joke about it with him now.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So you weren't supposed to tell anyone where you were?

Mr. Schlemmer

Oh, my goodness, no.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So you were all under complete secrecy?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes, but they knew in Tokyo where we were.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So where did you wind up on the coast then?

Mr. Schlemmer

San Francisco and went right on to a big Norwegian liner that was being refitted for troop transport. It had chandeliers and banisters 18 inches wide and polished like glass. We slid down the banisters. It was gorgeous. We spent one night on that ship and then we went on the Elliott. It had those six high bunks. We were there a few days. I can't tell you now exactly. I have an exact record at home. I broke down and got my records about five years ago. I wanted them because of my malaria history and getting to the age where I might go the hospital with nobody with me and my wife not be there. You've got to know those things.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Medical history is important. So you went on this fancy ship, but only for one night?

Mr. Schlemmer

And then it came over there with other troops.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Now the Elliott, what was the full name?

Mr. Schlemmer

The George F. Elliott and it was the AP Personnel Amphibious 13. I think we might have left on the 13th and it is the one that went down. It was hit by bombers on the 8th day of August, our sea bags and the rest of our packs all with it.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So the Elliott was a regular troop transport?

Mr. Schlemmer

Right, fitted with Higgins boats, not ramp boats, but the oldest kind of Higgins boat with the round prow and you rolled over the top of them. They were nice to sleep under though.

Mr. Meisenheimer

How many Higgings boats were on the ship?

Mr. Schlemmer

I don't know, but probably 16. You know some places they were two high and some places three stacked. I didn't count them.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Now you get on the Elliott and what were the conditions like on the Elliott?

Mr. Schlemmer

Some people complained, but other people didn't. The food I thought was good for being there until we started getting weevils in the bread. You'd just throw gravy on the top of it and what else do you need. I remember well that every Friday for breakfast, we would have baked beans and raisin bread with icing, sugar icing like confectioner's sugar type. That was my favorite meal on the ship. That would keep you going too.

Mr. Meisenheimer

How long were you on the ship?

Mr. Schlemmer

Well, we were on that ship until August 7th.

Mr. Meisenheimer

You never got off of it?

Mr. Schlemmer

We never got off except for work parties and if we slipped away into Wellington. We were supposed to go to Wellington and build a camp up in the Maxori country. We were supposed to stay six months, get trained, get our bodies built up with marching and climbing hills. When we got there, Vandergriff was handed a note that we were to land on Guadalcanal the first day of August. We were loaded for building a camp so what were the first things to come off? The trucks that you are going to put things on so we couldn't go to Guadalcanal that way. We needed to have ammunition on top.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So what day did you leave San Francisco?

Mr. Schlemmer

Well it was the end of June or the first of July. I am going to say it took us three weeks to get to New Zealand.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So somewhere around the first of July?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes, it was a long time to us.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Were you in a convoy or anything?

Mr. Schlemmer

There were a couple of other ships, but whether there was a convoy covering us we never knew for sure. We took a long route south so we always believed that we were on our own.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Did you zigzag?

Mr. Schlemmer

We zigzagged some, especially right at first. When we got way down south then they didn't do as much of it.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Then you arrived in Wellington, but you say you were not loaded for combat?

Mr. Schlemmer

No, and we had to unload and reload the ship because the longshoremen were on strike. We spent ten days or so working eight hours on and eight hours off duty loading day and night, rain or shine. We never stopped. We unloaded the ship and stacked everything out in the rain and put it back on so that the right things came off first.

Mr. Meisenheimer

There had to have been more than one ship.

Mr. Schlemmer

No, the Fifth had left before us and it was only the First Regiment was all.

Mr. Meisenheimer

And you were all on the one ship?

Mr. Schlemmer

No, a battalion with attached units, First Regimental Weapons and so on. Otherwise, I don't think there was anybody else on the ship but the Second Battalion. They weren't that big.

Mr. Meisenheimer

How about the First Battalion and the Third? How did they get there?

Mr. Schlemmer

I can't remember what ship they were on.

Mr. Meisenheimer

But they also came to Wellington?

Mr. Schlemmer

Oh, yes.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So you all came there?

Mr. Schlemmer

I'm thinking three ships is what we could see when we went, but it was unimportant to me then.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Now the First and Third Regiments were somewhere else?

Mr. Schlemmer

The Fifth had gotten there and unloaded, I think, and starting to build the camp. The Seventh went to Somoa and that's why when we went to Guadalcanal they attached the Second Marines to us instead because we weren't a whole division.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So there you were unloading and reloading and you were on eight and off eight. Originally the had told you to land on the first of August?

Mr. Schlemmer

We didn't ever know that.

Mr. Meisenheimer

You didn't know that at that point?

Mr. Schlemmer

No.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Did you know you were going to go make an invasion?

Mr. Schlemmer

If you had any head about you after we got it unloaded and started loading it back, it was pretty obvious. You knew something was going on.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Was Vandergriff there at all?

Mr. Schlemmer

I never saw him. I don't know but he was in New Zealand at the time. How he got there, I have no idea.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So you reload the ship now and then where did you stay, on the ship while you were there?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes,

Mr. Meisenheimer

Stayed on the ship the whole time.

Mr. Schlemmer

Except when we snuck out to go into Wellington. We snuck out once with our platoon leader.

We hardly missed a day of going into Wellington for an hour until the last when you got so tired then you started putting eight hours in the sack.

Mr. Meisenheimer

How long did it take to unload and reload?

Mr. Schlemmer

Ten days or about that.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So then you got the boat reloaded, then what did you do?

Mr. Schlemmer

It seems we left right away and we just left not knowing where we were going. The first thing we knew they were going to make a practice landing on the Fiji Islands so that was something new. We had never been in a boat landing before. That turned into a fiasco. The weather was bad. The place they picked to land was rough. It wrecked some boats. A few of the Fifth Marines got ashore. We heard that there were three of their men left there. As I remember it, our battalion was loading and our company had not gotten on the nets yet when it was said to hold this up because we can't lose anymore boats or men. Men were getting hurt going down the nets and it was over. I don't remember getting into the boats.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So you didn't have any practice then?

Mr. Schlemmer

No. We had had a practice on the nets at New River out in the ocean. They had a mockup of the ship and nets there, but no boats there to get into when we were there, but we went down the nets. The first time I went down into a boat that I can remember was at Guadalcanal.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Right out here?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So the only practice you had was that mockup boat there and the only time you went down into a boat was here at Guadalcanal?

Mr. Schlemmer

Right. It was calm and was not a problem at all.

Mr. Meisenheimer

When did you first find out where you were going and what was going to happen?

Mr. Schlemmer

I can't pinpoint that. Maybe three days before. It was after we were at Fiji. It took us some time to make it here at 8 knots.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Did they make some announcement that you were going to Guadalcanal for an invasion?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Did they tell you what to expect or anything?

Mr. Schlemmer

Hit the beach. We had a briefing for our company to lead the way to get to Mount Austin, but we had no idea what was here. There were no maps that were any good. I never saw a map of this island until after the war was over and I was a squad leader after the 21st of August. Information was not readily available. Some companies, I understand, got better information than ours did.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So on the morning of August 7th you arrived here. What happened then?

Mr. Schlemmer

We went into the boat and we went up on the shore and jumped off. We weren't rushing because there were Marines standing there that had been there before us. They were standing right out on the beach at the top away from the water. The Fifth landed before us and there they were. We watched the bombing and the shelling with interest earlier in the day and thinking this is going to be a bitch. Lots and lots of tracers and airplanes and we were thinking man it must be bad over there. We hit the beach and here were these Marines standing up there, and another one cutting a coconut open. So you stopped to get a drink out of your canteen. Then we got the whole company ashore. Our Captain was hollering with this high pitched sound to get going.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Around what time of day did you land?

Mr. Schlemmer

They tell me it was nine o'clock. Our watches were all on the Elliott. Anything of value was left in our bottom pack. We went with just the top pack. We had a poncho and one change of underwear and socks. We had three days ration and three days of ammunition. We were going to go to Mount Austin and the war would be over.

Mr. Meisenheimer

That was your first day's objective?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Now the rifle you had was which rifle?

Mr. Schlemmer

The '03, made in 1902.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Which helmet did you wear at that point?

Mr. Schlemmer

We had the new helmets with the insert.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Yes, the rounded instead of the flat?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes. Everything else was old issue, like cartridge belts and so forth, which was no problem because they were cartridge belts for the '03.

Mr. Meisenheimer

You said you had three days ammunition supply, how much would that have been?

Mr. Schlemmer

I think we carried two bandoliers apiece besides our cartridge belts, which only had three pockets on each side, ten shells in each pocket, five in a clip with two clips in a pocket.

Mr. Meisenheimer

There were six pockets?

Mr. Schlemmer

That's what I recall.

Mr. Meisenheimer

How many in a bandolier?

Mr. Schlemmer

Probably there was the same thing. It was longer than one side and then it had a long strap that went over each arm.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So that's what you had in the way of ammunition?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So then you get together and you start moving out. Were there palm trees there?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes.

Mr. Meisenheimer

They were all in rows?

Mr. Schlemmer

Probably 75 to 100 yards of coconut grove and it ran into bush or there might have been the Kunai grass for a ways. Right along the river was quite grown up when you got back away from the beach.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So you started up towards Mount Austin at that point?

Mr. Schlemmer

Supposedly that was where we were going.

Mr. Meisenheimer

What happened?

Mr. Schlemmer

We ended up on a little hill that was three miles or so from the length of the airfield from where we were supposed to be. But we were on top of a hill.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Had you had any fighting during that time?

Mr. Schlemmer

Oh, no.

Mr. Meisenheimer

None at all?

Mr. Schlemmer

No. We never saw a stray Japanese or a native. We just followed the guy ahead of us.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Did you hear fighting at all?

Mr. Schlemmer

No.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Why didn't you get to Mount Austin?

Mr. Schlemmer

We couldn't tell where we were going. The growth was so much that you couldn't read a compass and pick out a point and go there.

Mr. Meisenheimer

With the different ridges and hills and brush?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes. Everything was in your way. We would say let's go up this hill and we will be able to see better. The second thing was our map was drawn by a man who had lived there about 40 years before we got there. He had lived in Australia and he had drawn the map. He misplaced the rivers. We landed on the east side of the Lunga and the Tenaru, why would we have landed over there to get to Mount Austin? We did not expect to cross a river. We expected to go dry, by the map.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Did you dig in at this hill, or what did you do?

Mr. Schlemmer

Well, some might have, but nobody that I knew because we had no reason to fear anything until the battle started. We could see the battle of Savo from up there on the hill and we were beating the hell out of them. It was a long time before we knew that we had lost four cruisers there. We learned it on the island a long time after it happened, but we knew when the ships left because we watched them go when our ships left.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So then on the morning of the 8th, what did you do then?

Mr. Schlemmer

Well we waited for water and to try to get radio contact and see where we are because we couldn't see where we were supposed to be if this wasn't it. They finally get up there within a quarter of a mile of us with a jeep load of water cans and we open them up and pour it out and it was a red as blood. They were filled in the United States.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So it rusted?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes. Some said they couldn't drink it. I drank it. I said it's better than drinking the water running down the hill.

Mr. Meisenheimer

It didn't make you sick?

Mr. Schlemmer

No.

Mr. Meisenheimer

What was your rank at this point?

Mr. Schlemmer

PFC.

Mr. Meisenheimer

What was your position in the squad?

Mr. Schlemmer

Assistant squad leader.

Mr. Meisenheimer

How many men in the squad?

Mr. Schlemmer

Eight. There were four eight men squads in a platoon.

Mr. Meisenheimer

A lieutenant was in charge of the platoon?

Mr. Schlemmer

A lieutenant, a platoon sergeant and what they called a guide-on who was a three strip sergeant.

The squad leaders were corporals at that time.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So they bring you this water, then what happened?

Mr. Schlemmer

I can't tell you whether we started back right away after that jeep came up and had a message or something, but I think it took us two days to get back to the beach and the palm trees. It meant that we would have had to go partway back that second day, but it is kind of hazy.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So you went back to the beach?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes.

Mr. Meisenheimer

At this point you had not fired a shot?

Mr. Schlemmer

No, had not seen anything.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Had you even seen Henderson Field?

Mr. Schlemmer

No, we didn't know where it was.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So you go back to the beach, then what happened?

Mr. Schlemmer

I think we were kind of on our own for a day. By the time we got back and they started setting up a defensive line on the beach and a little way back on the Tenaru, because we believed that the Japanese would land on the beach just like we did. That is what we were doing. Our First Platoon was in reserve for the Battalion. The Second Platoon, which was my platoon, was next reserved platoon and one of our platoons was on the line. Our machine guns were on the line. Our mortars were up there, but we didn't have anything to do. We didn't dig any foxholes where we were, because there was no reason to until the bombs started coming. The first three days they could care less about anything except the ships that were there.

Mr. Meisenheimer

They were after them?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes.

Mr. Meisenheimer

That is when your ship got hit?

Mr. Schlemmer

The second day it got hit and then they sunk it the third day before they left. It didn't go down. It burned and burned out and floated around. They abandoned it twice.

Mr. Meisenheimer

What happened next?

Mr. Schlemmer

Well we patrolled and we by luck patrolled into territory that the Japanese had held and had some supplies. We found a few bottles of Sake and a few bottles of beer. I got a nice beautiful pure white wool blanket with the anchor on it. I put the beer and stuff in that and took it back to where we were camped. Somebody else gave me a bottle of beer to put in there until we got back and I backed up to a palm tree and let go of the blanket over my should and I heard clink, clink, with bottles breaking. Two out of five were good, but I washed the blanket out the next morning in the ocean and hung it up to dry, trying to hang it where it couldn't be seen. By 12 o'clock it was covered with maggots and I ditched it in the ground and covered it up because it was the purest white wool you ever saw. None of us off the Elliott had our blankets.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Did have a shelter half?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Poncho and a shelter hat?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Was fighting going on elsewhere?

Mr. Schlemmer

Not that we knew of.

Mr. Meisenheimer

You didn't hear any shooting?

Mr. Schlemmer

No. It is amazing how vegetation stopped that.

Mr. Meisenheimer

But there was fighting going on though?

Mr. Schlemmer

There was minor fighting until we got into a fight with 75s or the big mortars you never heard anything that happened at the other end. We never heard anything that happened at Tulage.

You'd think across the water 20 miles you would hear something, but no, we never heard anything. We were pretty peaceful and felt pretty good about things, until the ships left and we knew that was not a good sign. They were all gone and the Jap subs were there that you could see and shoots a little bit. We were still not too upset because we don't think there is anybody on the island and don't know anything that the upper echelon knows.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So then what happened next?

Mr. Schlemmer

I really can't fill in much then. We probably made some little patrols, because we weren't preparing kits and stuff. I know that we made some, but not every day and we didn't go very far with our platoon patrols.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So you were staying in a defensive position on the beach?

Mr. Schlemmer

Our platoon was located approximately 75 yards from the Tenaru, 75 yards from the beach, and angled backwards away from things, almost the edge of the palm trees from just inside them to get cover over us as camouflage. We could hear cattle walking in the kunai grass. That's how close we were to the grassy field there. There was firing at night, which if somebody heard something like a bush or animal they fired and sometimes there was a lot of rifle fire and there wasn't any Japanese there.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Just nervousness?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes, but we kept pretty quiet in our platoon. We had four good corporals and the men liked them, respected them and that is what kept things down.

Mr. Meisenheimer

When did you first get into combat then?

Mr. Schlemmer

On the 21st, but let me tell you first about the 20th.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Go ahead.

Mr. Schlemmer

At that time, our platoon didn't know that anything that had happened up ahead. Our lieutenant had been up to the captain's place and didn't tell us anything when he came back. We had two boys in our platoon who had birthdays either that day or the next day and they were 16 and 17. So we had a little celebration. We had opened a gallon can of sauerkraut, cold of course, and a gallon can of figs, and we had a little celebration. All of a sudden we heard airplanes and were

down on the ground and here comes a big star right over the top of the palms. There were fourteen of them and we never heard or saw them again. So we were as joyous as we could be and thought we were saved and they didn't forget us. It was a tremendous feeling, but the next morning, those two boys were dead. Around midnight, we were awakened and told that something was going on, to get dressed and have a bite to eat if you've got it and be ready to move. That's all we were told. We hadn't been told that they had run into them the day before or anything. Now it makes me angry to think about it. I never knew when they called up the first platoon, but they were called up before us and part of them went right up to the point. A Lieutenant Codrea was their commander, solid, good man. He got them up there close and then told them where to go to and the two squads that hit the point were right where the Japanese had gotten in the point. Sometime shortly after that they called us up. Sherman met us partway up and talked to Lieutenant Smith and he said to form up here, we're going in. The first squad, which I was in, just happened to be lined up to go right on to the point. The rest of our platoon spread out up the river, except one man. Captain Sherman told Sergeant Claffy, who was our Guidon to take a BAR to the beach right down here. I learned this later from Claffy. I didn't know it at the time. Just as we started out from where Sherman was, there was an explosion to our right rear. My next memory is not of going into a 37mm gun pit, but being in a 37 gun pit sometime before dawn. There was nobody in there but one man who said we're out of ammunition. The others had gone for ammunition. That was one from regimental headquarters. Someone remembered that there was some ammunition buried back there. We dug around there a little bit in the sand and found two cases of canister. My position on the ship was on a three inch gun and I was the head of the group that was helping man that gun. I learned enough about the guns to know where to fire it and how to traverse it. It was aimed right at the spit and we

used the ammunition up in probably 25 minutes and then we started using the forward part of that pit, which was probably less than three feet high, as a place to rest our 03's on. As they crawled up on the ocean side, they would stick their heads up to see how far they had come. We just had our rifles aimed at that point. If they came up where we had it we would ping. If they came up somewhere else, we would wait for somebody else to get them instead of trying to get one after he raised his head. That didn't work, they didn't stay up long enough. They spent another hour doing that. Meanwhile, the moon came up to the east. The water was still at that time and the moon shone off the water and silhouetted these guys heads as they came up the hill. They thought they were in the perfect spot and they were for us. I don't know if I ever hit any because everybody else was firing, but I thought I got some of those that were coming across.

Mr. Meisenheimer

This was Colonel Achichi's men, right? The attack by Colonel Achichi?

Mr. Schlemmer

Right.

Mr. Meisenheimer

This was called the Battle of Alligator Creek?

Mr. Schlemmer

We called it the battle of the Tenaru. That is what river we thought we were on.

Mr. Meisenheimer

And that's where we were a couple of days ago?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes, which is nothing like it was back then. Daylight came and we started seeing an officer or two somewhere behind the coconut tree. Later they came over and told us to hold our fire.

Somebody was going around behind and then the tanks came across the spit and went over and we watched that grinding up. One tank was hit and they knocked the track off. Two tanks drove up beside it and the men got out and all of them were saved.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Could you see that?

Mr. Schlemmer

We could see that, yes. There was no growth on the edge of the bank on the other side and our side at that time.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So they were on the east side and you were on the west side?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Now I understand there was an amphibious track that was damaged, one of ours.

Mr. Schlemmer

That's what they tell me and I asked yesterday where it was because there was a thing that happened earlier in the morning. I should have mentioned this before. After they quit coming across, we moved out to where we could fire directly across the river. I moved out next to a man from the squad leader's rifle team, Stitt who was wounded in his left arm, lying next to a small Japanese man and next to him was Lynch dead, and Carvalas dead. The whole First fire team, which had come in ahead of me was dead except the squad leader. I was talking to Stitt and said let me bandage your arm, because even if you hollered medic there weren't enough medics. We had one to the Company. Stitt said no, you'll get hit if you get up to bandage. I argued with him

and it got light enough that I could see that little Jap move and I couldn't reach him. Stitt was as Pittsburgh Panther football player the year before, a good man, and he carried two knives on hip. One was a stiletto and one wide blade. I said take that little knife and stab that Jap in the back. He did, he stabbed him, must have hit the back bone. The Jap jumped up and screamed at the top of his lungs and a machine gun on the far side cut him down and BAR from behind us fired, both at the same time or close enough that I could tell. Stitt rolled up on his side away from the Jap thinking he had a grenade or something. They said at the sick bay that he had been cut with a saber there, but I know what went through him because the blood came on me, not much, but some. The Jap fell down over the bank, gone, and that was just at daylight enough to see Stitt's arm and that the Jap was moving.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Did he live then?

Mr. Schlemmer

No, Stitt died. Delaney was at the sick bay when he was there. He thinks he was alive when they got him to sick bay, but he died there. They didn't take him out on the ship. We had one from our platoon that died out at sea after that battle. The others were all buried on Guadalcanal.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Four out of your squad?

Mr. Schlemmer

Four of my squad, eight out of the Company dead, maybe two or three wounded.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Was Stitt shot by our BAR?

Mr. Schlemmer

Ours, theirs, yes, both. A Japanese was screaming on our side of the river, you know people will do anything and hopefully they kill him. I didn't roll him over and look at him because I didn't want to get kill. You don't think about it until later. The firing came from over here and over here. We just heard from an old member of our Platoon, named Jim Couch, who lives in Idaho, who says the machine gun on the amphibious tractor shot Stitt. But I can't believe that machine gun was still in the amphibious tractor. Our mortars got that machine gun, but I can't tell you when. They were crack mortar men. I know there was a machine gun that fired. I've studied it for a long time and talked to these boys. We had two of the best NCOs on the canal in our weapons Platoon. We had Acord and Necicowski. They were tops. We had another one, Maug was a corporal that was in weapons. We had some leadership in the weapons platoon, a lot better than we had otherwise. I had a good squad leader, but the rest were not always up to that level.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Let me review again. Four of your squad were killed?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes.

Mr. Meisenheimer

How many out of your Platoon?

Mr. Schlemmer

Eight.

Mr. Meisenheimer

And from the Company?

Mr. Schlemmer

Fourteen from the Company. I can't tell you if we got in there before all of them were taken care of care. There was a dead Japanese close by and by night he was bigger than you are, bloated, and when I really noticed him was they brought us some food in cans that had lost their labels. We opened them with pocketknives back in those days. I opened a can with my pocketknife and turned the lid back and there was a big sheep's tongue sticking out and then I look at the bottom of the can. It said New Zealand sheep's tongue. Sergeant Ivey was our gunnery sergeant at the time and he got his at the same time I got mine. He was sitting on the butt of this dead Jap and just eating it like it's a wonderful thing. He was 5'8", 200 pounds, and he was as happy as he could be. I got up and went up and said, "Sergeant Ivey, if you'd like to have mine you sure are welcome to it". Then it was dark and we sat through the night watching for them to come again. We didn't know there were 90% of them in the ground by that time.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Did they attack again that night?

Mr. Schlemmer

No, but we thought they were going to. I never urinated from the time we left the coconut grove until the next night. I must have gone 20 times that night, every half hour at least, in a can. I was drinking water. I had time to drink water and I had time to worry about what was on the other side, and that makes you go sometimes. Our Lieutenant tells one of my squad to shoot down there, there's a Jap right down there over the bank. This friend of mine wouldn't shoot. He's still living by the way, Walter Witmer, and doesn't live too far from me. He said, "Lieutenant, it's a leaf on a plant that was there all day and it's still blowing back and forth". He called him sir and the Lieutenant said don't call me sir. So the next time he ran into him, he didn't call him sir and he said call me sir.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So this is the second night of the battle of the Tenaru?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes.

Mr. Meisenheimer

What happened next?

Mr. Schlemmer

The next day the Korean workers that the Japs had there came up with bulldozers and dug out the trench and the Koreans put the bodies of the Japanese in the trench and covered it all up. Then from then on we built that line up more and made patrols. Our squad was very, very small. The young man who was in the 37mm gun was transferred to my squad and a couple more people came in. I had been out enough and made a couple more patrols with my Platoon that I heard enough about going out that I decided he was shorthanded and when he goes on these longer patrols I would go with him. I volunteered to take my boys with him and Smith could take the other three squads on the short patrols. So I never made another patrol with him. Jordan was the type of man that you could follow forever. I get home after the war and found out he was a month younger than I am. He had the look and the voice of a man you follow. He would have gone ahead of you, he was that type of person, J. Luther Jordan, Jr. His name is on the plaque at the American Monument up there. He led an 80 man patrol up to Grassy Knoll. Other than that there is not a lot to tell about Guadalcanal.

Mr. Meisenheimer

That was your main battle?

Mr. Schlemmer

That was my only battle. I never fired a shot the rest of the time at Guadalcanal.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Did you get up to Henderson Field at all?

Mr. Schlemmer

No. We got around it at times. We patrolled behind it. If we went trying to steal some rations of some kind or beg something, we went on the water side, the bay side. We went past it when we moved after we replaced the First Regiment. We went to the ridges about halfway down to the Gifu and took up somebody else's position that had been there. I didn't know whose position we took up back at the end of the airfield that had tunnels dug as big as this underground that went back eight feet. It was wonderful to take over that position.

Mr. Meisenheimer

When the Battle of Bloody Ridge was going on, do you know anything about that at all?

Mr. Schlemmer

The artillery got into it and if they were in a position to get in a shot and it would be high enough up you could hear it. Otherwise with the foliage, hills and valleys, you never knew when a battle was going on.

Mr. Meisenheimer

How about bombing? Were you bombed?

Mr. Schlemmer

We were not where they were trying to hit, but they came awfully close to us. We were protecting the airfield and they were a little too close for comfort, but I don't know that we lost a man to the bombers unless they were on a working party and I just never heard about it.

Mr. Meisenheimer

How about washing machine Charlie? Did you hear him?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes, that's how you knew what time it was. It was midnight or there about.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Did you ever see any dogfights between their planes and ours?

Mr. Schlemmer

The only dogfight I witnessed that was close enough to really see was when I was on the east edge and there was one way over on the western side and you really couldn't see much.

Approximately a week after we were moved to the ridges, there was a dogfight between a Zero and a Grummen Wildcat.

Mr. Meisenheimer

About how long did that last?

Mr. Schlemmer

It lasted quite a time, because as I looked down to relieve my neck I would see more people getting up on the ridge to watch it. I couldn't tell who was getting the best of the other one at the time. They just kept up and down and around. Then we heard a peculiar sound. We looked a little different way and there was something falling towards us. The closer it got, the more it went woo, not like a bomb or shell. Then we could see it turning over. It was a belly tank and it landed between two of us. We were within 10 feet of each other and it landed between us. You talk about not knowing what to do, when we didn't know what it was, but it was how to get away from that bomb. As it tumbled, the air cut it off to the east side and it hit right where a sleeping tent was, because our holes were up higher. Whitmer and I watched that thing and that was the only close enough to see dog fight, because we were so far. Very seldom were there any over the

field. There were fighters hitting the bombers over the fields, but fighter against fighter were limited.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Who won that one?

Mr. Schlemmer

I don't know. We forgot about looking at them. They might have both gone away.

Mr. Meisenheimer

You saw several bombers shot down?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes, after we got down there. We were in foliage up there all the time.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So you left there in November, right?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Tell me about leaving.

Mr. Schlemmer

We were relieved. We didn't know that the Army was coming at the end of November, but we were up on the ridges at the time. Somebody said the Army was coming, but how did we know, but there was food dumped right down by Kukum that was probably three ship loads of food in that dump. We went down and cased the joint and they had no fence up yet. It was a big square, probably 16 foot high on the outside so that you couldn't get up and get a box. They had a big enough place for a truck to drive through with a guard on either side. We walked past a couple of

times. We split up down at the beach and two went up in front and another fellow and I went the back way. We figured we were smart enough to move a box out that wouldn't topple the whole thing. In fact, there were already boxes removed from the back. So we pulled out a box of cereal that turned out to be bran flakes, which was not our favorite, but we had it. Then we looked around for a box of evaporated milk. We found that and got it out. We went back and our squad ate that cereal and milk that afternoon. The next morning we spent on the john.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Did you have a problem getting food?

Mr. Schlemmer

We were short of rations. To start with, it was a big problem. Our Battalion had no galley. The galley and our rations were on the bottom of the bay. The Division and Regiment were not set up yet. When we did get going, we had a bunch of Japanese rice, figs that they had. We never starved if you ate that, but we went hungry. By the time to where we had a galley, the biggest problem was that we didn't have a cook. The cook was not a cook. He couldn't make anything without it turning green. We had pancakes with fig juice for syrup. Of course, there was no butter or any of that kind of stuff. But as things improved with the Navy, they did finally start bringing in mail after they got the runway and it slowly improved and the cooks got better. By the time we left, we were probably at the point where we were no longer losing weight, unless we had both malaria and dysentery at the same time. Our clothes weren't falling off of most of us. I can't say that I ever was really hungry. I never chewed grass like the Japanese did. I thought this got named Starvation Island because of us, but it was named that because of the Japanese.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Did you get malaria here?

Mr. Schlemmer

I didn't get malaria until I ran out of whiskey in Melbourne, sometime in May they found me with 105 fever and took me to the Army Hospital, the Fourth General Hospital in Melbourne. I was in the malaria ward with a beautiful nurse and a quinine tablet that I couldn't swallow. She said chew it up. I chewed it up and it was the most awful thing I could do. An hour after I had rinsed and rinsed, it was still there. The nurses changed and a young lady brought me a quinine tablet or two and I said don't you have liquid quinine. She said, sure, can't you take this? From then on, I had liquid every time. I was better in three days or so, but they kept you for quite a while until you got a negative smear before you went back out. I never had it again there. I never had it again until I was married and going back over seas.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Did you catch that here on Guadalcanal?

Mr. Schlemmer

I must have, but I was in such good shape that it didn't knock me down until I ran out of whiskey and started drinking beer. That's my story!

Mr. Meisenheimer

Let's go back to the time you were leaving here. The Army came in and you all left.

Mr. Schlemmer

The Army came in and some people left. On the 8th day of December, we were relieved, but we were still up in the hills. We marched back down to where we had been for two months previously and made a little camp there. We waited there and finally on the 22nd they said we were going.

Mr. Meisenheimer

You went where?

Mr. Schlemmer

Esprito Santos.

Mr. Meisenheimer

New Hebrides?

Mr. Schlemmer

New Hebrides. I was on a ship, I think President Adams, and they said their water machinery was not working and they had to put us off at New Hebrides, but they left right away. I heard later from people who didn't get off when we did that they got off that same ship within a week of that time. It ended up in Melbourne with some troops. So it was a rouse to get us off and more Army to Guadalcanal. That is just my thinking of what it was. We made a camp there in a French coconut grove. It was not paradise, but it was better than being shot at. They built some regular latrines for us, but they were so far at night and when you would drink beer and have to get up two or three times in the night, you would go right outside the tent and urinate on the base of a coconut tree. About three days of that, the Captain came along and said we have a letter from the French Ambassador that we are destroying the coconut grove and you will not urinate on the coconut trees anymore. They were mad enough having the head dug in the coconut grove, but the guys quit doing it pretty much. We were there for 10-12 days I guess and then we got on another ship and went to Melbourne. We found out afterwards that the Cricket Grounds was not ready for us. They were still working on it.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Now, this is the whole First Marine Regiment or what?

Mr. Schlemmer

I can't tell you that, but our Battalion was there. Maybe they had part of the Cricket Grounds done and the others went sooner. I think we all went down there together, because there was one ship that unloaded that night and there were a thousand girls there waiting.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Who was your Battalion Commander on Guadalcanal?

Mr. Schlemmer

At that time, it was Stickney. He was a Lt. Colonel.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Did he become commander?

Mr. Schlemmer

I don't know that Pollack came back. Pollack left us the 27th day of September went to Division and we were given Stickney as Commander and kept Chalfonte as Assistant Battalion Commander. Vandergriff wanted Pollack up there. Pollack was the brains of the Tenuru and not Cates at regimental headquarters. The story was that McArthur had called him to Australia.

When I got home and was reading later on, McArthur was there to look us over. Then later on he got to go to Vandergriff and argue about Pelilu and those kind of things. What we didn't know kept us alive, I guess.

Mr. Meisenheimer

What did you do in Melbourne?

Mr. Schlemmer

Nothing to speak of.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Training?

Mr. Schlemmer

Everybody was full of sores and they were getting to where you couldn't see them so where, but in the right light you could see spots on the legs, down to the feet where you had ulcers. There were still people with dysentery.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So it was basically recuperation?

Mr. Schlemmer

The main thing was to get people cleaned up, get uniforms, and almost like going back to basic when you had nothing except what we came from Guadalcanal with, so early on Lieutenant Jordan was made company commander. Sherman went home with our souvenirs and had rotary meetings. Of course, the Navy wanted him to do those kind of things. Somebody chose me to head a detail to get milk in the morning and meet in the afternoon. I had eight men I picked from my platoon, four from my squad and four from the rest of the platoon. We would get a truck and driver and go across the river and up the hill and find a pub, stop and have a beer, then go to the dairy and pick up the milk and butter and cheese. We would go back to the Cricket Grounds and have lunch there. In the afternoon we would go the Abatoir and get quarters of beef and mutton, lots of mutton, because they didn't have much beef. They had a million sheep for a cow at that time, now they have cattle. Then they had cattle, but not real big. Of course, in the evening it was open house liberty if you weren't on guard duty. You didn't need a pass. You had to be back at six o'clock in the morning. You didn't have to sleep at the Cricket Grounds if you didn't want to and it was heaven. It just was heaven.

Mr. Meisenheimer

What did you sleep in there? Tents?

Mr. Schlemmer

No, imagine a football stadium that was covered, or baseball field. They boarded up the front where you would watch the game, so probably eight foot from the roof and that was up under the overhand of the roof. It never rained or blew on us. Our beds were iron beds, two long legs and two short legs, three people high. Of course, there were latrines already in the building. I didn't spend much time there, but it was heaven to us. You could walk to Flenders Street Station if you wanted to and there was a tram that went by.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So this was like a great big barracks then?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes.

Mr. Meisenheimer

What rank did you have then?

Mr. Schlemmer

I was a corporal from the day of the Battle of the Tenaru, because my squad leader was killed. I was one of two PFC's. I had a year of college and the other one that had a year of college was Stitt and he was killed.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So you became squad leader?

Mr. Schlemmer

I became squad leader by default.

Mr. Meisenheimer

There in Melbourne, did you meet the Australian people?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes. The people that I made friend with were the family of the ladies that I met and they would take me home to meet the family. I would have supper at their house lots of times. Some of our people were designated to go and spend two weeks with certain families, like Wilson. The people he is visiting now down there are the offspring of the people that he knew before.

Mr. Meisenheimer

You didn't stay with any families then?

Mr. Schlemmer

No. I probably wouldn't have wanted to unless they had six daughters.

Mr. Meisenheimer

How long were you in Melbourne?

Mr. Schlemmer

We were there until approximately September 1st.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Of 1943?

Mr. Schlemmer

Right.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Then where did you go?

Mr. Schlemmer

Goodenough Island.

Mr. Meisenheimer

That's where?

Mr. Schlemmer

Decastrio Islands, which are off of New Guinea at the lower tip, not the upper tip that sticks out on the east, but off of the lower tip. Actually, there is a bay there called Goodenough Bay.

Mr. Meisenheimer

What did you do there?

Mr. Schlemmer

Supposedly we trained. We hiked a lot. We never fired a rifle there that I know of.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Did you still have the 03 or did you have the M1 by now?

Mr. Schlemmer

The M1 and I was equipped with a carbine instead of a tommy gun. I inherited the submachine gun. I was sure glad to have a carbine instead of that.

Mr. Meisenheimer

When you left Guadalcanal you still had your 03 then?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Then the M1 was next?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So you did more training?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes. It didn't amount to much, but it conditioned us to go into battle. We had a month or two or training just outside of Melbourne. That was in tents. We made a 100 mile hike back to the Cricket Grounds by circling more west around Melbourne. We were supposed to do that in 33 hours and we did it in 30. We had bacon with rice and raisins for rations. We walked 50 minutes and rest 10.

Mr. Meisenheimer

You never slept at all?

Mr. Schlemmer

No.

Mr. Meisenheimer

That's a tough one.

Mr. Schlemmer

That was doing pretty good with the double packs, machine guns and everything, a full Battalion.

Mr. Meisenheimer

You were still in G-company?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Now on Gudnuf Island there was more training?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Where did you go from there?

Mr. Schlemmer

They took us by LST to the upper tip of New Guinea, which is by Lae, right across from New Britain. We landed in that indentation there. It was to be against the Japanese big attack on the Australians. Some of our people, Fifth Marines, actually ended up down there where that action was going on. We didn't get into that. Then on Christmas Eve they came back with the LST's. We got on and made the landing on Cape Gloucester.

Mr. Meisenheimer

That's on New Britain?

Mr. Schlemmer

That's the closest place to New Guinea there. Our Company was detached from the main Battalion and we made a landing of our own and we set up a roadblock on a track to the main airfield. We were attacked about the third night by a force coming down the ridge. We lost four men there and wiped out about 100 of the attackers. I never fired a shot. Someone in my squad did for no reason, because we were not where the action was. I had to jump over and get in his hole and calm him down, but first took his rifle away from him. I told him there was nobody down there and they weren't going to attack us and it just gives away where we are. So I went through Cape Gloucester without firing a shot. I was on an outpost for three weeks on the north side of the Island with my squad and on a trail and never saw a Japanese. None of use fired a shot. We blasted a couple of fish out of the creek with hand grenades in the middle of the day when we knew we weren't going to cause any problems. They don't make a lot of noise if they go down three feet in the water. We did a few of those little things that we shouldn't have done. I had a kid with me from Texas who was a shepherd in way out west Texas. He could start a fire in the rain with nothing but his pocket knife and a piece of steel and flint. He would look at a piece

of wood and play with it. Pretty soon he was taking off shavings no bigger than toothpicks. He would make a fire. There would be no smoke. They didn't want smoke where they were shepherding and he was a whiz. He was a real nice kid too. I don't know what happened to him after the war. He hadn't been with us all the time, so he was a new one. We woke up in the middle of the night one night and it was raining like hell and I feel my butt was damp. We had these hammocks that were mosquito net zippered. I rolled out of it and was hip deep in water and it was flooding. I got out to raise my rope and I raised it as high as I could raise it. The cord was wet and stretching and I was still in the water. You couldn't get out of it, because you couldn't see to go anywhere so you had to stay where you were tied to that tree. We went to chow the next morning and Jordan led us. I swear he walked into a bomb crater that had water hip deep. He just slowly disappeared to the bottom and then walked out the other side. So we all went around.

Mr. Meisenheimer

On the landing there, did you have the Higgins boats with the ramp on the front?

Mr. Schlemmer

We landed there in the LST.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Okay. Anything else happen there?

Mr. Schlemmer

Nothing other than the fact that the Lieutenant called me in from the outpost that I was on to have lunch with me in the Officer's Mess. While I was there, he said that Colonel Puller

Mr. Meisenheimer

Was this Chesty Puller?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes. He wanted to talk to me to get information about where we were. He was on the hill above us on dry ground. He said, "We're thinking about going up the coast and I want to know how it is where you guys are. Have you seen Japanese? Have you seen any evidence of Japanese? Did you get down and look for tracks?" I told him I got a tracker in my squad from out in Texas. There has been nobody past that point where the creek and track meet since we've been there and I would guarantee it that boy would have seen it. Everyday he inspects that and every night he inspected it. We stayed off of it ourselves. We traveled around it. That was the highlight of my time there, getting to talk to Chesty Puller.

Mr. Meisenheimer

What was his position then?

Mr. Schlemmer

He was a Battalion Commander, but not mine, as I recall.

Mr. Meisenheimer

What else happened there?

Mr. Schlemmer

Nothing that I remember.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Where did you go from there?

Mr. Schlemmer

Pavuvu in the Russell Islands, which are right across from Guadalcanal. Instead of having somebody build a camp for you, we built our own camp. At that time, they had some replacements come in and they come around and said five men are going home from your

Platoon. They had a helmet with numbers in it for certain people who had been there for two years. Corporal Shannon and I were both eligible in our Platoon. No sergeants were eligible then. They drew out four of the five by the time they got to our Platoon and Shannon was the first one to draw ahead of me. He drew and had one between his fingers and one in his thumbnail. He had to put them back and draw again, and he drew a blank. So I knew before I drew that I was going home. I was back in Ohio on the 14th of July or about then. I got my gallon of gas a day.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Did the entire First Marine Division come to the Russell Islands?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes. That was there next jumping off place. They went to Pelilu from there and they didn't go to Melbourne, but to Pavuvu. It was a hell-hole. Rats run over you at night when you're asleep and throw your blanket off. I wasn't there long, but long enough to meet Eddy Peabody, the banjo player. I happened to be Commander of the Guard that day and took the crew down to stop traffic on the road that was made out of coral to land the Piper Cub to bring him to us. He was the whole show. Of course, there were only two in a Piper Cub, the pilot and him. I didn't get to see the show, but I got to shake his hand. I saw him later two places and sent notes to the back to him, and got recognized. Once the wife and I sat with him at intermission. We had him for the First Division Reunion in Chicago. I didn't pester him up there, but I set at a table in front. So I got to hear him twice.

Mr. Meisenheimer

When you got back to the States, where did you go from there?

Mr. Schlemmer

I went to San Diego and took intelligence tests and scored high enough that they sent me to Officer's Candidate School at New River, North Carolina, back where I had been before. I interviewed with a Major Bruggerman. He was a real nice man I had met before, though I don't remember where. He started out by saying do you know why you are here? I said no, I don't even know where I am. He said you're in Officer's Candidate School and in six or eight weeks you'll be a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps and you will be going overseas. I said, you mean without a leave? He said, yes. This was just before they went to Pelilu. I said, well, I'll tell you sir, my girlfriend and I spent a lot of time together in July and we think we are going to get married on October 21st. He said, if you get married you won't finish the course and they'll throw you out. So I said I just might as well not take it. So they sent me to Hadnot Point where they did Officer's Training School other than what they did there. They had their outdoors course at this place to first find out how tough you were and what you could do and how you could shoot. That's where I put in my next five months of duty where was running the projector or telling about jungle warfare, and very little at that. Mostly at that time I was handling equipment.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So you were working at this camp now?

Mr. Schlemmer

It was good duty. I got married in October. The wife came down with her mother to Raleigh and we got married. We went to the Hostess House for a week. Then I took her back to Indiana, back to school so she could finish her senior year of high school She planned to come visit me over Christmas. After she was down there four days, I had malaria and I knew it. I went to the sickbay, but they couldn't get positive smear. I stuck around another five days and they shipped us out. I got on the ship and told them I had malaria. They said no, you don't. We shoved off and

a week later I had a 104 fever. I was that close to not going back overseas. They treated me and I ended up joining the rear echelon of the Third Division, E Company, 9th Marines and waited for them to come back from Iwo Jima, to do training to go to Japan. In the meantime, they make a one-year man a sergeant to replace a squad leader, which now had 12-man squads. They make me his assistant. I was still a Corporal, passed all the tests and been in three years, so it kind of irked me a little bit. So I decided to volunteer to be the demolition sergeant, so I did. I had helped blow some trees down with Captain Moriarty when we were on the ridges of Guadalcanal, so I had set off some charges. They wrote it in my book that I was the demolition sergeant, but I didn't get three stripes. Then we trained to float in with demolition packs. We had to take a 100 mile hike and in that hike I keeled over from the malaria and woke up in the Division Hospital. They said you can't have malaria, that there is no malaria here. I said I got malaria on Guadalcanal. They said they had cured it before. I went back out on the trail again and I really conked out that time and they took me to a Naval Hospital. The first thing I told them was the malaria and took my blood and I had a shot of quinine within 15 minutes of the time I got to the hospital. I was burning up and they were putting ice on me. I couldn't tell the Marines I was having malaria for two years.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Where was that Hospital?

Mr. Schlemmer

On Guam. We landed on Guam, a guy from the Second Marines and I together. We come across together. We loaded a bunch of troops and got on the back of that truck and took a long drive around to the camp, which was probably 10 miles. As soon as we pulled up out of the harbor, we could see ships, ships, ships, and ships. We had been overseas two years and never saw that

many ships in the whole two years, even counting the Japanese. Then we passed a B29 that was being built up. They were not flying at that time, but strictly parked. They were all brand new, five at least. We wondered what in the world. It was unbelievable to see that much weaponry. The difference between when we went in in January and didn't have anything to 200 ships in that harbor at one time and we're fighting a war in several other places was unbelievable. When the Japs ran four of our ships away we thought it was the end of the world and this was just tremendous. There was also a fleet or two at Iwo Jima. We knew that was going on, by that time they were telling us when things were happening. They dropped the atom bomb when I was in the Naval Hospital and the war was over while I was in the Hospital. I had recuperated to where I was going out to shows at the Hospital and things of that sort. That's where I was and to this day if anybody says we should not have dropped the atom bomb, I'll tell them I would have never come home from Japan. We were supposed to land on the very bottom tip of Japan and I would have been one of the first men in, although I might have drowned before I got there. I was going to go if I could. Think how hard they would have fought for their own ground if they fought like they did on Pelilu and Iwo Jima and Okinawa. I had enough points, of course, by that time to come home. I got to Maryland at Bainbridge Station in time for Thanksgiving. We got checked in there and a nice Naval lieutenant and boson there. They looked at our papers. There weren't many of us. They asked if we would like to go home for Thanksgiving and then come back for a little while and then you can get a 30 day furlough for Christmas and New Years, but you have to be back on the 3rd to get out on the 4th. That was too good to be true. It didn't happen that you got Thanksgiving off to come back and then go home again. So we took them up on that and we didn't go home, but went to Washington to have a good time, not spend the money to go home, because as soon as we got back we would go home again. Then we got 30 days and were home

for Christmas and New Years. We were back at Bainbridge for discharge on the 4th. They looked at our teeth. They said I had 11 cavities and gave us a chip to get them fixed at home. I was just elated. It was four years of hell and four years of finding friends like those here with me.

Mr. Meisenheimer

When you volunteered, how long did you volunteer for?

Mr. Schlemmer

Four years.

Mr. Meisenheimer

And you actually spent four years in?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Did you stay in the reserves?

Mr. Schlemmer

No, that was the catch between the two. If you picked four years, you were not in the service after that. Finnegan, Horstman, and many that went back and to Korea. It was just time enough that they all made rank. Some of them stayed in and retired. Some didn't because they already had a family. If the family was used to living in one place, they didn't want to be going around the world with their husband.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Did you ever have any experience with the USO?

Mr. Schlemmer

None in the Islands. Never saw a USO show in the Islands, though Eddy Peabody may have been a USO show.

Mr. Meisenheimer

I mean as far as Bob Hope or anything like that?

Mr. Schlemmer

No.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Schlemmer

None.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Salvation Army?

Mr. Schlemmer

The Salvation Army was there with some things, but not often.

Mr. Meisenheimer

How about souvenirs?

Mr. Schlemmer

I didn't take home any souvenirs, but I turned over a sword and saber that I had to James R. Garrett who now lives in Fort Walton Beach. He was in the 11th Marines and happened to have a truck and foot locker and the day that Captain Sherman was real disturbed with us because somebody stole his chocolate, he stopped us. We were moving from our second position to the ridge position through deep mud. Somebody hollered at me and it was this Garrett. I went to high school with him in Edinburgh. I said here take this home for me, because I'm going to lose it

before the day is over and Sherman will take it away from me. Rube took it home. He went to Australia, but went right home from there. He put in his time, then went into the Army, got many stripes, went to Germany. He put in enough time to retire in Germany, plus a few more. One night at midnight he had a few too many beers. He woke me up and said hey Schlemmer, what do you want me to do with this sword? I said, well, I don't care what you do with it right now. I said, let's talk about it some other time. We got together several times. I had a daughter in Birmingham at the time, which made it handy. Then we got to reunions and so forth. He was going to the Washington Reunion, but I didn't get there about 20 years ago. So I told him to take it to the Marine Museum in Washington and put it there in our names, presented by J. R. Gerrig and A. R. Schlemmer. That's what happened to the only souvenir that I had. Some of them went home with other guys, like a Japanese camera, a medicine kit that had iodine and all that. We could have used it ourselves and it went in a footlocker.

Mr. Meisenheimer

When you were overseas, did you get mail fairly regularly or not?

Mr. Schlemmer

We didn't get any mail on Guadalcanal for probably three weeks. I wouldn't want to say for sure, but it was about that long before the first B-17 came in with mail. We may have gotten a little by boat or something, but the first real mail that I remember getting was four cartons of Beechnut Chewing Tobacco. My mother down in Edinburgh had the distributor of it bring a carton to her every week and she mailed it to me. Of course, she started that long before it got there. The ones that were sent in June I got maybe the first of September with four of them at once.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So you were chewing tobacco at that point?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Still do?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes, not as much as I did then though.

Mr. Meisenheimer

How about pay? Were you getting paid?

Mr. Schlemmer

We didn't get paid on Guadalcanal but once for \$5 if my memory serves me right. We had no place to spend it unless you got out to a ship. We got paid \$5 while we were on the ship going to New Hebrides. We never got anything in New Zealand. Probably they didn't have the money with them then or the records. That was the least of our worries at that time. We never saw a native on Guadalcanal except when a patrol went through us once and that was the only time I saw a native here.

Mr. Meisenheimer

What was your most frightening period do you think?

Mr. Schlemmer

The most frightening experience was probably when I realized where I had been the night of the 21st. Sometime in the morning when I knew there were people trying to come up and my shellshock, if I had it, had disappeared. I don't remember being scared to go in there, but that was about the most frightening thing.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Did you get any ribbons or battle stars or anything?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes, I have four battle stars. I have the Presidential Unit Citation. I have a copy in my records that says your commander on 21 August 1942 recommended 94 men for bravery at the Tenaru River. Then it says on January the 22nd, the Secretary of the Navy denied the request, back in Washington. I would have rather not known that. Being made corporal at the time had given me the confidence that I was doing alright and I didn't do anything for a medal or I'd have been killed.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Now what four battle stars were those?

Mr. Schlemmer

Two for Guadalcanal, one for New Guinea because I was there and the action was going on and part of our outfit actually went into it. The fourth one was for New Britain. We had a star on our Presidential Unit Citation. I have a combat action ribbon.

Mr. Meisenheimer

The Presidential Unit Citation was for which unit?

Mr. Schlemmer

The entire First Marine Division.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Now you are here on Guadalcanal with some other people. Who is here and why are you over here?

Mr. Schlemmer

Last year we were at the Reunion in Orlando, FL on July 4th and talked about it. Wilbur Bewley wasn't there and he is one who is here this week. James Wilson was here and left for Melbourne already. William Finnegan, Joseph Delaney, Louis Imfeld are also here. Everyone but Bewley was in Orlando and we decided that we would go back to Guadalcanal for the 60th anniversary. Lou Imfeld kept up talking about it and we finally got our heads together and said why don't we go to Melbourne too. It has been almost 60 years since we had been there. It would not be completed if we didn't go to Melbourne. So we are going to Melbourne on Tuesday and stay until Sunday, then go to Sydney and then be back in Cincinnati, OH Monday night. It took us two days to get here and we're going home in a day.

Mr. Meisenheimer

So you were all in G Company?

Mr. Schlemmer

Yes, we were all in G Company for two years together. Delaney came home at the time that I did. The rest of them went to Pelilu. Delaney, Beule and I joined together in Cincinnati at the substation. We didn't join as a group. One was from Middletown, Ohio and the other from Cincinnati and I was from the just west of there. We became friends right away and we're still friends. We take care of each other.

Mr. Meisenheimer

And you've had a number of reunions over the years?

Mr. Schlemmer

I've been to about 40. I've been to Washington, DC four times to the reunion and New York City four times, Chicago three, Detroit and all over the United States.

Mr. Meisenheimer

And these are all First Marine Division?

Mr. Schlemmer

Right. I've been the Guadalcanal Veterans Reunion, to Chattanooga and up in Michigan. I was at the first one of the First Marine Convention that was started in Boston by Colonel Jack Fitzgerald of the First Amphibious Tractor Battalion, who was a cousin of John F. Kennedy.

Mr. Meisenheimer

Anything humorous you remember along the way?

Mr. Schlemmer

Those would be best if we had the group together.

Transcribed by Jo Ellen McCarthy, daughter of Albert R. Schlemmer, Sr.