

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

Center for Pacific War Studies
Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview with

James E. Wilson

February 24, 2003

Interview With

Mr. James E. Wilson

Mr. Richard Misenhimer

Today is February 24, 2003. I am interviewing by telephone Mr. James E. Wilson of PO Box 1601, Jasper, AL 35502. His home phone number is 205-221-3267. 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

Jim, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today. I've got the recorder going now. Let me read this you. Can you hear me well enough to understand it?

Mr. Wilson

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

It says: The purpose of The National Museum of the Pacific War, Admiral Nimitz Museum, oral history project is to collect, preserve, and interpret the story of World War II, the role of Fleet Admiral Nimitz and home front experiences by means of a tape recorded and/or videotaped interview. Audio and video recordings become part of the archives of the National Museum of the Pacific War, Admiral Nimitz Museum, Texas Parks and Wildlife. These recordings were made available for historical and other academic research by scholars and members of the family of the interviewee. Any transcription, which may be subsequently produced of the recording will be conducted with the knowledge of the interviewee by the National Museum of the Pacific War. We the undersigned have read the above and voluntarily offer the National Museum of the Pacific War full use of the information, audio and/or video recordings of these oral history

research interviews. In view of the scholarly value of this material, we hereby assign rights, title, interests pertaining to it to the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Parks and Wildlife. Is that satisfactory with you?

Mr. Wilson

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me start off with where were you born?

Mr. Wilson

Where was I born?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes, sir.

Mr. Wilson

In Walker County, Alabama.

Mr. Misenhimer

And what is your birth date?

Mr. Wilson

12/31/20.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to school?

Mr. Wilson

Here in Walker County.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you finish high school?

Mr. Wilson

When did I finish?

Mr. Misenhimer

High school, yes, sir. What year?

Mr. Wilson

In 1938.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you go into the service?

Mr. Wilson

In January of 1942.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do between high school graduation and going into the service?

Mr. Wilson

I was worked in the coal mines a while. Then I got the job in Birmingham in an automobile dealers parts department. I was working at night and going to school in the daytime.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you went into the service, did you volunteer or were you drafted?

Mr. Wilson

I volunteered. My war experiences started in the summer before Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about that.

Mr. Wilson

In Birmingham, my brother Bill and my cousin Barney Terry Dobbs, joined the Marines. They knew they were going to get drafted anyway, so they wanted to choose whatever they were going to get into. So they joined the Marines. They got into the Air Wing part of it. When Pearl Harbor came along, I was working in Birmingham at night and going to school in the daytime. I figured they would need some help. So I joined the Marines after I became 21 to go help my brother Bill. The reason I waited until I got 21, I didn't want to ask my mother and daddy to sign for me, because I doubt if my father would have signed. So when I had my 21st birthday, I went down and signed up for the Marines to help my brother Bill, in Birmingham.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you actually go into the service that day or when?

Mr. Wilson

January 5th.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go for boot camp?

Mr. Wilson

Paris Island.

Mr. Misenhimer

How were things there?

Mr. Wilson

Paris Island was one of the most impressive experiences I have ever had in my life. It was probably one of the most effective teaching methods known to man. First they got your attention and got your mind off of worldly things. Then they began to teach you. In my opinion, that was the most effective teaching that could be done anywhere.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think of your drill instructors? Were they real rough on you?

Mr. Wilson

They were rough, yes, but I understand what they were trying to do. I thought their methods were very effective. I didn't enjoy some of the things that we had to go through, but they taught us that each man was responsible to the platoon. That the platoon would have to suffer if one man goofed off, the whole platoon would have to suffer. We had to keep ourselves in line and keep our fellows in line because we didn't want to pay the penalty. If we did some infraction that we had been ordered not to do, they would take us out and make us double time on the parade ground. That can get pretty rugged and it gets your attention if a fellow did some infraction, like didn't turn the lights out or didn't clean his rifle or didn't learn some of the stuff they were trying to teach us.

Mr. Misenhimer

Which rifle did you have there?

Mr. Wilson

We had the 03.

Mr. Misenhimer

Bolt action?

Mr. Wilson

Bolt action rifle. They were from World War I, I think.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were some things in your training that you did, such as go to the rifle range?

Mr. Wilson

We first started out with close order drill and learned to work as a platoon. Then we went to the rifle range and took marksmanship training and firing the 03 rifle. We had lots of instructions on the weapons, different weapons, what the Marine Corps was all about and what we were expected to do. There were lecture series and things like that. I don't remember really having any maneuvers of any kind there at Paris Island, but we all knew that we were getting ready to go to war.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long was that boot camp?

Mr. Wilson

It was very brief. I think we stayed there, I believe, it was seven weeks.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you live in there?

Mr. Wilson

Quanset huts with oil heaters and it was cold as ice. Paris Island was the coldest place on earth.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was the food?

Mr. Wilson

It was adequate. You didn't have your mind on food. You had your mind on what that drill instructor was going to do. The food had to be adequate or it would have made an impression on me.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else you recall from your time there in boot camp?

Mr. Wilson

When I got back from the war, I went to Paris Island as a drill instructor.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you left boot camp, where did you go then?

Mr. Wilson

We went to Camp Lejune in North Carolina.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do there?

Mr. Wilson

That's when we went into company and platoon maneuvers, practice landings and hikes, things like that. We studied weapons and camouflage and military maneuvers.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you train on machine guns or anything like that?

Mr. Wilson

I didn't, but of course, we had heavy weapons. I was in a rifle platoon. We had BARs, Browning Automatic Rifles. And we had machine guns in our company. We had mortars. We learned about grenades and we had learned about grenades back in boot camp.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you there?

Mr. Wilson

In Camp Lejune?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes, sir.

Mr. Wilson

We left San Francisco on June 22nd, so we went from Camp Lejune across country on a troop train.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that train trip?

Mr. Wilson

We were ordered not to correspond with anybody or call any of our relatives or anything like that. Every time we would stop at a station, Red Cross workers and people at the station would greet us, pass out goodies and things like that, post cards. We weren't supposed to be writing any postcards, but they did. I loaned my pen to some of them to write with and when we got in Nashville, I thought what the heck, everybody else is writing home, I'm going to write a postcard. So I wrote a postcard and handed it out the window to what I thought it was one of the trainmen, but it turned out he was an FBI man. I wrote a postcard that said just passing through, will contact you later. So they arrested me and put me in irons and put a man with a loaded rifle on me the rest of the trip. That turned out to be a blessing because I was first in line everywhere. I was first in the chow line and anything else that came up. I had a private bunk. When we got to San Francisco, the man that ordered me arrested was Major William Shelfont III. We understood at that time that he was one of the Kotex heirs and serving at a dollar a year. I'm not sure if that's true or not. He was sort of hard to live with. We got to California and my battalion commander, Colonel Pollack, called me out. Well we fell out in formation and he wanted to know what that fellow was doing in the irons and all. I had to march up in front and salute him and the entire Battalion. He asked me what I did and what I had been doing and a few other questions and he ordered them to release this man back to duty. He told me to go back to my platoon. I said, "Thank you, sir" and saluted and returned to my ranks.

Mr. Misenhimer

Had you been assigned to a unit at this point?

Mr. Wilson

No, I was already assigned to G-2-1.

Mr. Misenhimer

What unit were you assigned to?

Mr. Wilson

2nd Battalion, First Marines, G Company.

Mr. Misenhimer

What company?

Mr. Wilson

G company.

Mr. Misenhimer

George II, first, first, okay. When were you assigned to this company?

Mr. Wilson

At Camp Lejune.

Mr. Misenhimer

At Camp Lejune, okay.

Mr. Wilson

Yeah, that's when we formed the First Regiment.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did anything else ever happen to you from your arrest?

Mr. Wilson

I never heard of it anymore. While we were at Camp Lejune, we knew we were getting ready for war. We didn't know when we would go and we expected that we would get a furlough before we shipped out, but we never did. I got a long weekend, like a 72 hour pass, or something like that and went home twice. The first time, I went on the Greyhound Bus and we were involved in a fatal accident near Columbia, SC. Apparently a carload of drunks ran head on into us and killed two people in the car and bruised us up somewhat. I was home then about 12 or maybe 24 hours before I had to go back. Then the second time, just before we shipped out, five of us from Birmingham hired a taxi cab from Rocky Mountain, NC to take us to Birmingham. We got over there near Athens, GA and met two big trailer trucks coming round the curve and had to go between them. It killed our driver and the boys in the front seat got cut all to pieces with glass. Us in the back seat got skinned up and bruised. I was home that time for six hours.

Mr. Misenhimer

The two that were in the front seat, did they have to go to the hospital or anything?

Mr. Wilson

Oh, yeah. They were cut up and bleeding and the driver was killed.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you get back to Camp Lejune from your home?

Mr. Wilson

That's a good question. We must have caught a bus on to Birmingham and then a bus back to Camp Lejune.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they do anything to you for being gone then?

Mr. Wilson

Oh, no. The insurance company took a statement from all of us and told us they were going to do all these great and wonderful things for us and they knew we were fixing to ship out. So we never heard from them anymore. They were going to pay us for our injuries, but we never heard from them anymore.

mr.m

But as far as getting in trouble with the Marine Corps, you were not in any trouble with them, is that right?

Mr. Wilson

No. We got back on time.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else from your time at Camp Lejune?

Mr. Wilson

I don't remember anything of significance.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you in San Francisco?

Mr. Wilson

We were there several days. It was very pleasant there in San Francisco, although we were restricted to the ship. They put us aboard the George F. Elliott, a Marine transport, with all of our equipment. When we got to New Zealand, we went to Wellington, New Zealand. The dock workers were on strike and we had to do most of the work ourselves. We were taking our time and suddenly we got orders to unload them and reload them for combat load. That's when the stuff really hit the fan. That was the most physical punishment I ever saw. We worked four hours

on and four hours off. You hardly got to sleep before it was time to go back to work. Loss of sleep and physical exhaustion and resentment build up.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long did it take you to go from San Francisco to New Zealand?

Mr. Wilson

Seems like it was about 21 days.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you in a convoy?

Mr. Wilson

Oh, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you escorted by destroyers or some other warships?

Mr. Wilson

We had a cruiser with us. One cruiser.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how many ships were there altogether? Do you recall?

Mr. Wilson

I think there were seven.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you in New Zealand then?

Mr. Wilson

Let's see. We left San Francisco June 22nd and we landed on Guadalcanal in August. We unloaded and reloaded and headed north, about a month. We went from winter to summer to

practice amphibian landings, how to get off ship into landing craft, etc. We had intensive instructions in care of our person in the tropics, use and care of weapons, organization and communication, first aid, working together as a unit. We began taking medications, Attabrine, I think.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did the practices go there?

Mr. Wilson

It was pretty rough. Climbing down a rope ladder with both ships moving, the landing craft and the big ship, a fella could get hurt.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many times did you make a landing there?

Mr. Wilson

I think we made at least two or three practice landings.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get off the ship in Fiji?

Mr. Wilson

No, no.

Mr. Misenhimer

Stayed on the ship, the whole time there?

Mr. Wilson

No, we never did go ashore.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then you left there and went to Guadalcanal?

Mr. Wilson

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

I believe August the 7th is the day you landed there, is that correct?

Mr. Wilson

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

What time did you go ashore?

Mr. Wilson

Seems like it was about 8 o'clock in the morning.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you in the first wave, or what wave?

Mr. Wilson

I think our regiment had three waves. Now the action that morning was over on Tulage and I landed on Guadalcanal. I didn't go to Telagi. When we landed, we landed without firing a shot. There was no opposition where we landed. I keep thinking we landed on Red Beach, but everywhere we landed was on Red Beach. Anyway, we got ashore and there were other Marines ahead of us, so I wasn't in the first wave. There were beautiful sand beaches and coconut plantations. We didn't know what on earth we were facing, scared to death, in a sense, but more wonderment than anything why somebody wasn't shooting at us. Our objective was that big hill overlooking the airport and we were supposed to take a 240 degree azimuth and go directly to that grassy knoll. Forty-five minutes after we hit the beach, we were lost, completely lost and isolated

from the world in the jungle. We were having to cut our way through. I think they had partial radio contact with somebody, but our unit was lost and we never did get to grassy knoll.

Mr. Misenhimer

So your unit was a company or a battalion or a platoon?

Mr. Wilson

A company, G company.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got lost, what did you do then?

Mr. Wilson

We kept going where we thought we were supposed to go. When we got back in contact with the Regiment, we rejoined the Regiment on the beach.

Mr. Misenhimer

In the same day, or did you spend the night out there?

Mr. Wilson

Yes, it was on the second day.

Mr. Misenhimer

You spent a couple of nights out there?

Mr. Wilson

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Had you come across any opposition yet?

Mr. Wilson

Not yet. We heard lots of firing down around the airstrip. There was a lot of firing going on, but none in our immediate area.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have food with you?

Mr. Wilson

We had canteens of water, but we ran out of water, by the way. Then we had whatever rations we carried, which must have been C-rations. As I said, I made three landings and all of them were different. We carried rations in our packs, whatever it was.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else along that particular excursion that you recall?

Mr. Wilson

No, just that it rained a while and the sun would shine a while. You would be hot when that sun would come out, it was real steamy and miserable.

Mr. Misenhimer

As I recall, wasn't the Elliott sunk there?

Mr. Wilson

The Elliott was sunk, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Before you got all of your supplies off, is that right?

Mr. Wilson

Yeah, all of our medical supplies were on the Elliott and I don't know what else. It was sunk about the second or third day. We saw it. It was an aerial bomb from a Japanese aircraft attacking, the second or third day. The transports were trying to get out. They pulled out to get

out of the way and they got the Elliott. We were digging in on the beach. We had been assigned a location on the fence perimeter around the airstrip, Henderson Field. Our assignment was the mouth of the Tenaru River, my battalion, the Second Battalion. We were dug in on the banks of that river which ran into the ocean at high tide. At low tide, there was a sand spit of clear beach at the mouth of the River.

Mr. Misenhimer

At that time, did they call it Alligator Creek?

Mr. Wilson

No, they called it the Tenaru River.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you bombed or shelled while you were dug in there?

Mr. Wilson

Yes. They bombed us every night and shelled us in the daytime, a lot of times in broad daylight. We didn't have any kind of weapons that would reach them. They would come out sometimes in broad daylight and fire into our area. That is a miserable situation, not being able to shoot back.

Mr. Misenhimer

The Japanese ships were shelling you?

Mr. Wilson

Yes, even submarines would come up out there and shell us. We had an old gunnery sergeant, who was an expert with 80 mortars. I can't call his name right now, but his mortars kept them out away from us. They wouldn't come into his mortars. They would only fire so far and the Japanese ships would stay out of his range and just keep on firing shells at us periodically.

Mr. Misenhimer

Would you be bombed in the daytime or at night or when?

Mr. Wilson

We were bombed and bombarded by ships day and night, not constantly, but frequently. We had a Washing Machine Charlie, an airplane that had two engines. They made a strange sound. The engines were out of sync. Anyway we called him Washing Machine Charlie because he just came over to keep us awake at night. He would drop a bomb every once in a while, but he flew over constantly at night just to keep us awake probably.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any anti-aircraft guns?

Mr. Wilson

We did, but they managed to stay out of the range of our anti-aircraft. We had some pretty good anti-aircrafts.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what happened?

Mr. Wilson

My platoon was in reserve, back behind the lines. We got word that every night there would be firefights all along the line. We got to be pretty bad trigger happy. One of the biggest fights that we had one night was that we were firing guns at our artillery people and they were firing back at us. We had a pretty good war one night. There was a lot of firing all along the lines. We were dug in in a semicircle around the airstrip and all along the line there was firing going on at night. Every strange noise folks would shoot at it, but my platoon was back in reserve about 12 days and we got word that there was a Japanese force landing down the beach that was going to come up the beach. They were going to jump on us and take the airstrip back. They told us reserves to

stand by to move out. They said they would probably be there sometime after midnight and for us to stand by to move out. So we all cleaned our weapons, made some food, and got our canteens filled. We got ammunition. Some of us took a bath and put on clean clothes. I put on, of course, the last clean clothes I had and in my old dungarees I left my wallet and my lucky piece and everything I had in the pockets in the dirty dungarees. In my clean dungarees that I had on, I didn't have anything in them, except my cigarettes and I think that was all I had in there. I also had a New Testament in there. I had a lucky piece in my dungarees that I had on me ever since I left Birmingham. My uncle saw me off at the train station and shook hands with me and through his hand he left a lucky piece in my hand. It was a medal, some kind of a railroad medal. He was a conductor on the railroad. I had that medal on me every step of the way until that night. I left it in my dirty dungarees along with my wallet, pocket knife and whatever. So the next morning, they called for us and we left going to the front where the firing was and the Japanese hit up there at the mouth of the Tenaru. I didn't have my lucky piece and that was the first time that I had ever been separated from that lucky piece. That is when I got shot that morning.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about moving up.

Mr. Wilson

We could hear the firing going on, of course, and see the lights flashing. It got louder, louder and louder the closer we got and we could hear the bullets hitting the trees and see limbs falling off. The closer we got, the louder it got. We were running bent over. The closer we got, we got faster and faster. Finally, we got towards the front, all bent over, hoping we didn't get hit. When we got up there by the dugouts, somebody told me to take my squad out on that sand spit and don't let nothing come around it. I don't know who told me that or why they told me. So I took eight or

ten men out there and we got out in the open with no cover whatsoever and lay down on our bellies. Of course, it was still real dark, but the Japanese were coming in waves. The noise would pick up real deafening and then it would slack off a little bit. We had orders to shoot anything that moved. I think I had fired a couple or three shots. I had raised up my head to open the bolt to my O3, which I wasn't supposed to do, and I got hit in the helmet with machine gun bullet on the left side. It parted my hair and came out the back of my helmet. Pieces of my helmet lodged in my back, near my spine and paralyzed me from the waist down. I couldn't move my feet and legs. We had no sign of any cover whatsoever and the minute that I got hit, my thought was I'll jump up and run back behind the dugouts. In the instant that I thought that, my buddy on my right jumped up and I could hear the bullets hitting him, so I knew that was a bad mistake. So I lay there in the sand for a couple of hours. After a while, I could tell that we were winning. The bullets were coming so close they were knocking sand in my eyes and face. It was a miserable couple of hours. I thought I was paralyzed because I couldn't move my feet and legs. I didn't know how in the world I was going to get out of there. I got where I cried, and prayed and cursed all at the same time. I just had to sweat it out until the firing died down. But let me tell you what I was thinking when I was lying there. The most horrible thought that ever entered my mind was, you see there were stacks of dead Japanese out in front of us, like logs, and I thought for God's sake did Americans do that to the Americans at Gettysburg? That was one of the most horrifying thoughts I have ever had in my life, lying there thinking I would get hit again any minute, that I wasn't going to make it and wondering if the poor old Americans did that to each other. Anyway when the firing sort of died down, one of my buddies came hunting for me. He hollered for me back around the dugout area. He said, "Wilson, are you hurt?" I turned my head around and I said I think I'm hit. He could see the bullet hole in my helmet. He said, "You think you're hit, I

wouldn't take a thousand dollars for that helmet." He called the corpsman and he asked me if I could get up and I said I couldn't. There was still a lot of firing going on. So I crawled with my elbows and my rifle back to where the corpsman was and I pulled up to him. He dragged me up in behind the dugouts and treated my wounds and gave me a shot, a lot of sympathy and that sort of thing. He called for stretcher bearers and took me back to the First Aid Station where the doctors were. We got back there and the doctors checked me out. There were three or four ships that had come in the night before with aerial bombs and aviation gasoline. We almost had Henderson Field ready for our aircraft. They got word that there was a Japanese force on the way and they sent word up to the battle site that if you have any wounded bring them down to us and we'll take them off. So the stretcher bearers took us down to the trucks and we were dropped on the deck of the ships. They were converted destroyers, I think, maybe called APDs. One of them was the Calhoun and I can't remember the other names. In less than three hours, I was aboard ship after I got hit. The stretcher bearers were running when they got my stretcher all bent over and that's pretty hard work. I had no pain what so ever and I told them you don't have to run, I'm not in pain, I'm at peace and I feel good. So they slowed down and quit trying to carry me at a run. They finally got me out there and loaded us on some trucks and they hauled us down to the beach.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let's go back to the time you were on the front line there. Did you fire your rifle at all?

Mr. Wilson

I didn't fire over two or three shots. I got hit about the third or fourth shot.

Mr. Misenhimer

You mentioned the person on your right was hit. Were any other people around you hit?

Mr. Wilson

I'm not sure, but we couldn't stay there and live. So we had to move. We had to get somewhere. We were out almost in front of our dugouts. One of those killed was Butterwick. I have been in touch with his brothers and his family, corresponded with them. I joined the First Marine Division Association and also I subscribe to the Guadalcanal Echoes, the newspaper. Are you familiar with that?

Mr. Misenhimer

No, I'm not familiar with that.

Mr. Wilson

Guadalcanal Echoes is a publication about Guadalcanal veterans and The Old Breed is the name of the magazine that the First Marine Division organization puts out. I got in touch with his people through one of those magazines. When we left on that ship, that night they sounded general quarters. The scuttlebutt was that we had run into this Japanese task force scouts and they thought we were a task force and we thought they were a task force, so we ran from each other. But you could feel the front end of the ship rise up and feel the vibrations from the engines at full speed ahead, and a ship loaded with aviation gasoline and aerial bombs was the most frightening experience of the entire war. We got out of there and ended up at a hospital in Espirito Santos in the New Hebrides.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you still have no feeling in your legs at all?

Mr. Wilson

It was about four days I believe it was that the feeling came back in my feet and legs. They put me on KP. I started helping mopping, sweeping the floors, and things like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all kind of treatment did they do to you there?

Mr. Wilson

About all we had then was sulfa drugs. There on the island my corpsman gave me a shot of morphine I guess before he realized that I wasn't hurting nowhere. Then he gave me a handful of sulfa drugs and bandaged my wounds in the back, put that sulfanilamide powder on it I guess.

That was the extent of the treatment.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they have to take out any shrapnel or metal out of your back or anything?

Mr. Wilson

No, they said it was too close to my spine. It's still in there.

Mr. Misenhimer

So then they put you on KP and clean up duties, right?

Mr. Wilson

Yeah. In a short while, they put us on a New Zealand ship Wahini back to New Zealand, all the Marines who were able to be put back on duty. We left New Hebridies and went to New Zealand on the Wahini. We got into Auckland one day and we must have got in there about breakfast time, because they came to us and they thought we were heroes and they said you can have anything in the world you want for breakfast, just tell us what. I said give me a bowl of corn flakes and some cold sweet milk. So I had a big bowl of cornflakes and cold sweet milk and then, of course, I had some scrambled eggs, toast and bacon. Then that night we went aboard a train from Auckland to Wellington. It took us all night just about to get back to Wellington to where we left from. All of us that returned who were wounded were put into what was called a

casual company. We had light duty tasks around the area until we got able to go back to Guadalcanal. When enough of us got able to go back, we went aboard the ship and pulled out from the docks. We had made contacts with people, the islanders, while we were there and there was a huge crowd of people on the docks while we pulled out. They started singing that New Zealand Nations Mauri farewell, Now is the Hour. Have you heard that? Now is the hour. When we must say goodbye, soon you'll be sailing far across the sea, while you are away, oh please remember me, when you return you'll find me waiting here.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes, I have.

Mr. Wilson

That was one of the most memorable occasions of my life. Now is the hour when we must say goodbye, soon you will be sailing far across the sea. And we did. We went back to Guadalcanal and back to my same outfit now. Then my outfit was up in the ridges, same platoon, same company and all my buddies were still there.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you get back to Guadalcanal, what date?

Mr. Wilson

Must have been November 10th, because it was about the time they sunk a bunch of our ships out there. There was an awful sea battle out there one night. We lost a bunch of ships. It was close enough to be just like a thunderstorm out there. We could hear guns and torpedoes and flashing lights. That was when I think when all of our supply lines were withdrawn. I'm not going to say it was then, it might have been before that. Anyway we were all alone and lonely up there for some time. I think we got off there in January, no around Christmas, because we were in New

Caledonia in the harbor there close by the Enterprise on Christmas Day of '42. The people on the Enterprise shared their Christmas dinner with us.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got back to Guadalcanal, was it quite a bit more fight to go before you finally left?

Mr. Wilson

It was almost over, not too much, patrols, etc., the worst naval losses however. The Army came in and took over our position then and we went down to the beach for two or three days. We went aboard the transports.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were on Guadalcanal did you see any dog fights between our planes and Japanese planes?

Mr. Wilson

No. Our fighters got in there the day that I got shot. We could see them coming in from aboard the ship. See the airstrip wasn't finished when we landed there. We finished it and got it ready for our fighters to come in. They came in that day of the 21st and we saw some of them as they came in.

Mr. Misenhimer

So then you got down to New Mia in New Caledonia then?

Mr. Wilson

Yeah, went to New Caledonia.

Mr. Misenhimer

You got off the ship there, is that right? You unloaded there?

Mr. Wilson

No, we never did get off the ship. We went ashore for some reason, maybe work parties. I think I got a beer ration while we were there. But the Enterprise was sitting out there with a hole clear through it, you could almost drive a truck through. We didn't stay there long. We were going to Australia.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you land in Australia?

Mr. Wilson

In Melbourne.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do there?

Mr. Wilson

We were put up in the Melbourne Cricket Grounds. The First Regiment, 3,600 of us. They filled it full of steel bunks, double deckers and put the bunks on the stadium seats after they sawed the legs off and propped them up to where it was fairly comfortable. They put up as much tarpaulin type stuff as they could to keep the wind away from us.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was their summertime wasn't it?

Mr. Wilson

I'm trying to get it straight in my mind. After we had been there about a month, the people out in the country invited the Marines to come and live in their homes, like on a vacation, for 10 days. There were two Marines to the home in the farmhouses up there. Everybody didn't volunteer. I was raised on a farm and I looked forward to it, so I volunteered. We got on the train and went to the end of the line, north, and they had irrigation up there. That's how far out we went. We spent

10 days in the home of this wonderful family, at Kahuna Australia. They entertained us royally. By that, I mean we went to movies, and dances. We went swimming in the irrigation ditches. They fed us all kind of good food and couldn't do enough for us to entertain us. The place where I was staying had a beautiful 18-year-old daughter. We got pretty well acquainted and we have been in touch ever since. I got a letter from her last week. We became sweethearts. When we went back to Melbourne, she had a beautiful voice, singing voice and they were putting on a joint military show, American and Australian military, were putting on a big show, musical type show in Melbourne for entertainment of the troops. They invited her to come down and sing in this and come down to Melbourne. She had relatives in Melbourne. She came down to Melbourne and we continued our relationship up until I actually applied for permission to apply for a marriage license. But you had to get permission from your commanding officer before you could apply for a marriage license. I had applied for permission from my commanding officer, but we shipped out before it was ever granted. We were awfully close and had a beautiful relationship. After 1988 or 1989, I went back and made a search for her and found her. We have been in touch ever since. I carried my family down there the next Christmas and then they came up here, she and her mother, came up to our house and we went to Boston to visit an old Marine buddy up there. Then they came down to my house and stopped a couple of weeks here in my guesthouse. After that is when we went down there and spent Christmas with them. We've been corresponding ever since. My daughter and I went back in August of last year. Members of my Marine Division organization meet once a year and we all get together for three or four days. A lot of us from the old original G-company have bonded together and they started about going back to the 60th anniversary of Guadalcanal. I had been looking for some excuse to go back to Australia anyway, so I agreed to go back with them, because we were going to have to go to

Brisbane to go to Guadalcanal anyway. Six of us decided we would go back to Guadalcanal on August 7, 2002. My daughter, who is 26-years-old, wanted to go with me. She went that Christmas and was well acquainted with them, the whole family. She wanted to go with me and see where I got shot and then go down and visit with our friends in Melbourne. We left Los Angeles and flew to Sidney and on up to Brisbane. The plane going into Guadalcanal only went in on Tuesday and Thursday. My buddies made reservations on Guadalcanal to be there about a week. So I didn't have no business on Guadalcanal for a week. I wanted to go there and see the spot and attend the memorial services and then go visit with my friends in Australia. So my daughter and I made reservations to come out of there on Thursday and were going back to Melbourne and the cricket grounds where they had planned a celebration. They had recently commissioned their historian to write a book about the Marines' stay there in 1943. He had just finished his book. They said this was a wonderful opportunity to have a book launching and have us six original Marines there as guests in the Melbourne Cricket Grounds. So my daughter and I got there and our friends had found us a nice apartment right in the heart of everything. In the meantime on Guadalcanal, there was a labor dispute and my other buddies couldn't get off the island. So we had set up the book launching and banquet for August 15th at the Cricket Grounds. We Marines were going to be the honored guests. As it turned out, my daughter and I were the only honored guests there. The rest of the boys were still on Guadalcanal. They got off that night and came on in to Melbourne. They put on another banquet the next day and had all of the six original Marines there for a real swanky banquet type thing.

Mr. Wilson

The cars that ran very much had a gas fire, coal burner or something like that. Does that ring a bell?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes, right.

Mr. Wilson

Some kind of a fire burning charcoal and running on the gas from that fire. They didn't have gasoline, everything was rationed. We were heroes to them and they took the position that we had saved them from the Japanese and anything they could do for us they would go all out. It just made for a beautiful relationship. In fact, one of the highest points of my life was parading in Melbourne. They wanted us to parade, the First Regiment, and we did with over 1,000,000 people on the streets and sidewalks. We paraded down one of the main streets and our company was in the front of the whole thing, right there with Chesty Puller. Chesty was leading us, he and some of the other officers. But you talk about excitement, with all the cheering, and throngs of people. Our band was leading the parade and when they struck up Stars and Stripes Forever, my feet wouldn't hardly touch the ground. It was that level of excitement. It was, I think, probably one of the highest points of my life. We had malaria and said we were going to a cold climate to get rid of the malaria and dysentery. So when we got back on our feet, well physically, we began having maneuvers. We went out on short maneuvers. It was cold. One time we were out on maneuvers and it was sleeting. We were sleeping in the pup tents and the ground was covered with sleet, but we were having a ball actually at night and on weekends. Of course, everybody had malaria. It was a long time before I got malaria. One of my best friends was a commercial artist from New York and he had rented an apartment for times when we were on liberty to go there and cook, sleep and have parties. So one particular Saturday night, we had a big party planned there at the apartment, then I came down with a high temperature. They had the party going full blast and they kept wanting me to come down and join the party and I finally got it

across to them that I was sick. They called a cab and sent me to the hospital. I got to the hospital, I think American built, and I had a real high temperature and had to walk up four flights of stairs. I was about to pass out I was so miserable. They finally screened me and assigned me to a ward. They gave me medicine, of course. The orderly carried me down to my ward and assigned me to this bunk. Whoever had been in that bunk before, when they left and made it up, they short-sheeted it. Does that ring a bell with you?

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh, yes. Been there, done that.

Mr. Wilson

So they thought I was delirious and I kept telling them I was short-sheeted. They wanted me to get in the bed and I couldn't get in the bed. They said sergeant we've got plenty of sheets, you don't have to worry, but actually it was the bed. It took a while for them to find out how come I couldn't get in the bed. Anyway I think that was a 21-day trip and it wasn't too long after that we shipped out to New Guinea, getting ready for Cape Gloucester invasion.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were in Melbourne, did you get a lot of replacements?

Mr. Wilson

Oh, yeah, the entire outfit was built up for the battle. We got replacement fresh from the States.

Mr. Misenhimer

Of the original group that went in on August 7th, about how many were left? Half or more or less?

Mr. Wilson

I believe we had at least half or more that made it and still in the same outfit. All of my real close friends, four of us just like brothers, made it and I was the only one that got shot at Guadalcanal. So we got our recruits and went on maneuvers and trained them. We got new weapons. We got the M-1s and a lot of new artillery, submachine guns and things like that in Melbourne.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you like the M-1 better than the Springfield?

Mr. Wilson

Oh, yeah. It was the difference in daylight and dark. It was a real improvement.

Mr. Misenhimer

Semiautomatic compared to bolt action?

Mr. Wilson

It would hold eight shots.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes, eight shots compared to five.

Mr. Wilson

You just had to pull the trigger.

Mr. Misenhimer

About when did you leave Melbourne? Do you recall?

Mr. Wilson

We jumped off from Finch Hoffen in New Guinea on Christmas Day, so we had been there about almost a month, as I remember on maneuvers and weapons practice. We went to the firing range and that sort of thing. We landed on Cape Gloucester on Christmas Day 1943. My outfit, the Second Battalion, apparently made such a good impression on Guadalcanal that they gave us a

special assignment on Cape Gloucester. They sent us down between where the main body was landing and there was a big Japanese base on the other side of the island. I think it was Bougainvillea.

Mr. Misenhimer

Rabal was down there.

Mr. Wilson

Rabal or Bouganville?

Mr. Misenhimer

Rabal was on New Britain.

Mr. Wilson

So they sent us along the coast about 10 miles below our main landing body to set up a roadblock to keep any reinforcements from coming up to the airstrip that we were going to take there on our end of the island. So we landed down there and stayed down there about two or three weeks in a roadblock situation. I don't think we had communications. It was supposed to be secret. The Japanese weren't supposed to know we were there. Anyway they found out and we got hit one night. I don't think we had but five or six casualties. That was the only firefight we got into down there. Then we marched back up to the main body up at the airport. So again we were around the airport and stayed there until we got relieved. We went from there to Good Enough or Pavuvu, I can't remember now which. We got ready for Pelilu.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've heard you went to Pavuvu.

Mr. Wilson

We went to a training area on Pavuvu or Good Enough. It seems like one or the other. I've forgotten now which it was. It was a staging and training area. We did a lot of training. The USO shows came down there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Who all did you see in the USO shows?

Mr. Wilson

That stuff never did impress me too much. I think I went down one night and I think I saw Bob Hope and Jerry Calona and that group. I don't remember that much about it. I hardly ever went to a movie. I would write letters. At that time, I had been promoted. I was an acting platoon sergeant. When we hit Pelilu, I was an acting platoon sergeant that came about while we were in that staging area there. We hit Pelilu on September 15, 1944. So between Christmas of '43 and September of '44 we had gone on to Cape Gloucester and got relieved and got replacements and retrained and ready for another assault landing. We were only on Pelilu about 15 or 30 days. We were declared ineffective after the fifth day, we had lost so many men. Chesty Puller was there, the regimental commander. They pulled us off the line after two and a half days as ineffective. I think he volunteered for us to go back. We went back and we had a lot of replacements. We had cooks and bakers and hospital corpsmen and dog handlers and anybody they could find to carry a gun, or ammunition or water. So we went back to the ridges and stayed until, I think, from the 15th until the 30th. Anyway, they promised us in the beginning that it would be short and sweet. Of course, it was and all of my buddies got killed there.

Mr. Misenhimer

The four of you that were close, got killed?

Mr. Wilson

The four of us who had become like blood brothers so to speak, the other three were killed. Pat Shannon was killed about 45 minutes after we hit the beach and the commercial artist, John Oliveri, was killed by one of our own men at night. He was in intelligence, battalion intelligence, and the Japs infiltrated through our lines and got back there and everybody was shooting at everybody else. One of our own men killed him.

Mr. Misenhimer

What a shame.

Mr. Wilson

We went in with 247 men in G-company and I brought 31 out, besides the heavy weapons and I'm not sure about how many heavy weapons men came out. I had all the riflemen.

Mr. Misenhimer

Had all your officers been killed or wounded?

Mr. Wilson

I was the senior NCO present, yes. Some had been relieved for combat fatigue.

Mr. Misenhimer

And the officers had all either been killed or wounded?

Mr. Wilson

Yes. We got back to Pavuvu and the Battalion executive officer came around and wanted affidavits from me about getting medals and decorations for those people who deserved it. We spent a couple of days going over that sort of thing. When they got through they asked me, Sergeant, what would you rather have, a medal or a meritorious promotion? I said, I would take the meritorious promotion. That was it and I never heard from it again for 10 years. After I got out of law school and got home and practiced law, the Secretary of the Navy sent me a citation

for meritorious service. It was a letter of commendation, about 10 years later. I don't know what happened to my promotion.

Mr. Misenhimer

That meritorious promotion would have been to an officer?

Mr. Wilson

They didn't say. I thought it would probably be a warrant officer.

Mr. Misenhimer

Sergeant Major or something?

Mr. Wilson

Yes, I was the platoon sergeant all the way through and I was a buck sergeant. I didn't question that. I wasn't in it for metals, so I asked for the promotion

Mr. Misenhimer

Didn't get either one?

Mr. Wilson

Never got either one.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was the fighting on Pelilu worse than the fight on Cape Glouster and Guadalcanal?

Mr. Wilson

Yes, there was no comparison. In Guadalcanal and Cape Glouster, we were dug in and they were hitting us. On Pelilu, we were attacking and being shelled. They could see us. They were in the ridges up over us, shooting mortars at us, artillery, and machine guns and everything else. That was what we were going into. My experience on Guadalcanal was a walk in the park compared to Pelilu. Now that would not be true for those Marines who stayed there all the time and

suffered all of that starvation and dysentery and shelling and bombing. Pelilu was hard to describe unless you were there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then you left there and went back to Pavuvu, right?

Mr. Wilson

Yeah and then from there back to the States. We got home November 17th.

Mr. Misenhimer

Of what year?

Mr. Wilson

For a 30-day leave.

Mr. Misenhimer

Of '44?

Mr. Wilson

Yes. My Daddy and I were listening to news on the radio when the Battle of the Bulge was on in Germany. But let me tell you about my brother.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, tell me about him.

Mr. Wilson

You know I went in to help my brother Bill. Well, when I got shot on Guadalcanal, my brother Bill was in the Virgin Islands guarding the virgins. I never did get to help him. He was in the air wing there on submarine patrol. We never did get together.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did he fly?

Mr. Wilson

He was in maintenance.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did he stay in the Virgins the whole time?

Mr. Wilson

Oh no, they went from there to China.

Mr. Misenhimer

To China?

Mr. Wilson

Yes. His outfit became the First Marine Airwing and I'm not sure where all they went.

Mr. Misenhimer

So after your 30-day leave, what did you do?

Mr. Wilson

Went to Paris Island as a drill instructor.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that duty?

Mr. Wilson

That was the hardest work I ever did in my life, the most responsibility, 24-hours a day, seven days a week. It defies description actually, the responsibility, if you're serious about your job and conscientious. I started out with two assistants in the first platoon that I carried through. Both of them ended up, one got a venereal disease and went to the hospital, and one of them got transferred. I ended up by myself. That is the hardest and most responsibility that I ever had in my life. I also received one of the highest compliments of my life the last night before my first

group shipped out. We had a very informal bull session. I apologized for not having time to cover everything a good Marine needs to know, but I want you to remember a good Marine is always a gentleman. They responded, "Sergeant Wilson, you have already taught us that".

Mr. Misenhimer

How many recruits did you have under you?

Mr. Wilson

I believe it was 47, around 47 in each platoon. The second platoon that I picked up I had almost ready to go out and carried them down to the main station to get our shoes fixed. We went to the Shoe Shop and I was standing on the curb on the sidewalk waiting to cross the street and an MP truck came along and ran over my foot. My foot was extended out over the curb and the truck brushed the curb and broke my foot half in two. That pretty well wrapped up my Marine Corps days. I was in the hospital a good long while and then on light duty for a good long while. I got out in September, got discharged on points, in September. I got home one day and went to the University the next. My younger brother was all packed and ready to go the University. He was going to law school and I didn't want to be left behind so I didn't even unpack. I just got on the bus the next day. We both went to Tuscaloosa and went to the University of Alabama. I graduated there from Law School in August of 1949.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you say that your father had passed away?

Mr. Wilson

While we were in law school, he was 49 years old. He had a heart attack all suddenly.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think of Chesty Puller?

Mr. Wilson

Well, I wasn't all that familiar with him. I saw him up close a couple or three times there on Pelilu. He had his shirt off and had a pipe in his mouth and was under a poncho for protection from the sun. We were backing up for some reason and went back to his location back there. He had a poncho spread up over some poles where he could get out of the sun. I didn't realize at that time anything about him really. We went to the ridges the fourth time and we got knocked off every time. My company commander got shot about the third trip we made up there. We would back off and regroup and go up again. One time, I remember, we had war dogs with us. One of the war dog handlers got shot and the war dog wouldn't let the corpsman treat him. They had to shoot the dog before the corpsman could treat the handler. That was back in an area around where Chesty Puller was. You asked that question, I'm reminded I read in one of the magazines and I correspond with several of my old buddies and one of them sent me a cartoon of the First Marine Division on Korea and got knocked down in the Chozen Reservoir, and got surrounded by Chinese, the whole division. Have you heard of it?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes.

Mr. Wilson

They said when they told Chesty Puller that we're surrounded and the Chinese are all around us, he said, well they're never get away with that. Now we can shoot them in all directions. I'm not sure about that. But anyway they fought their way back to the coast and got out of it. He must have been an awfully aggressive type person.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes, he was. I've read quite a bit about him and he was. You mentioned the war dogs. What did the war dogs do?

Mr. Wilson

I'm not sure. That is when we would get knocked off the ridges and go back, they would try to fill the ranks up with somebody. We had one of the most interesting things that happened to me on Pelilu. The Black Marines were the supply people. They would bring in supplies in the daytime, ammunition and water and food, things like that. On more than one occasion, I had them ask permission to stay out there with us at night and they wanted to help us and they wanted to know if it was alright if they stayed up there at night if we would give them a gun. They always wanted an automatic gun, one that shoots fast. But they were deeply concerned with our welfare and wanted to help. It made a lasting impression on me.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else you recall from Pelilu?

Mr. Wilson

The tank attack the first afternoon we were there was an outstanding event. Of course, it didn't last long and they were very expeditious and didn't do all that much damage. We were approaching the airport and a little tank, they were smaller than our Shermans, headed out across the airport towards us. As they were coming, they looked like they were galloping, like a horse galloping almost, going so fast and firing their machine guns. One of our Shermans would pull out in front of them and one blast would knock them completely out of commission. So they didn't do a lot of damage. I remember one other thing that I personally remember. We had really been in hell and one morning we were stationed along a line up there near the foot of the ridges. When we began to stir that next morning, I realized I was hungry and I don't reckon I had eaten

anything since I had left the ship, but I remember eating two cans of C-rations. We had trouble keeping water up there. We didn't have fresh water all the time. One time they brought us a bunch of water up there that had oil in it. It was contaminated and we had problems keeping fresh water along the lines. You talk about dog fights with aircraft, we had them on Pelilu. There were all kinds of dog fights with fighter planes. They promised us that we could read a newspaper anywhere on the island at night as long as we were there, so they would shoot those flares out of a five inch gun off of the cruisers and sure enough it was a real help, but they ran out of the shells about the third or fourth night. We caught hell then.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were there any banzai chargers there? Did the Japanese do any banzai charges?

Mr. Wilson

In different areas, not a big total smashing banzai, but in some areas they would pull a small one at night a squad or two of them would come out screaming and hollering and carrying on, but not in a real big way. Of course, we took care of them pretty well. A lot of times they would break through and infiltrate, but they would always get finished off before they could call themselves succeeding.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get home with any souvenirs?

Mr. Wilson

Lord, no. From Pelilu, no. There were no souvenirs anywhere.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get any from anywhere?

Mr. Wilson

My helmet I got home with.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get home with it?

Mr. Wilson

Yes, I got my helmet. I got it right here today.

Mr. Misenhimer

The one with the bullet hole in it?

Mr. Wilson

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Good. Did you have any experience with the Red Cross anytime?

Mr. Wilson

Yeah. The Red Cross to me did an excellent job. I wrote a letter from Australia to the hometown newspaper commending the Red Cross for the wonderful job they were doing.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did they do?

Mr. Wilson

When we didn't have nothing, they would bring us something, like toilet articles, writing paper and they would take messages to send home. They were just in general sympathetic and trying to be helpful. They were always available if you had problems. They had a Red Cross band there in Melbourne that put on a dance every weekend. The local belles would go to the Red Cross dance with chaperones and they would let us dance with them every once in a while.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get any ribbons or medals?

Mr. Wilson

I got the Purple Heart. I've got several ribbons. I don't really know what they stand for, but I got the Purple Heart, and three bronze stars.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about battle stars?

Mr. Wilson

Yes, campaign ribbons with battle stars in them.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get three battle stars or four?

Mr. Wilson

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now in August of '45 Japan surrendered. Do you recall where you were when that happened and what was your reaction?

Mr. Wilson

In August of '45?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes, August of '45.

Mr. Wilson

I really don't and I'll tell you why. When I hit the University that absorbed and took up every ounce of attention that I had. I think it saved me from having a lot of bad dreams and neurotic things that happened to folks. I was so busy keeping up my classes that I didn't have time to

worry about nothing else. It was all I could do to keep up in school, for 48 months, and I never drew a dime of unemployment insurance. I was busy. Of course, the GI bill was paying my way in school. But I was involved and I wasn't paying attention to anything else much.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you start at the University?

Mr. Wilson

In September of '45. Well, now wait a minute, I was at Paris Island in August of '45.

Mr. Misenhimer

When Japan surrendered, right?

Mr. Wilson

Oh, yes. Well, I remember now. Yes, I was very much aware of what was going on there. I was in the hospital, but we were all very much concerned about the news, the atom bomb and that sort of thing. We were greatly relieved!

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else you recall?

Mr. Wilson

The tremendous bonding and comradeship is remarkable. And, I was telling my wife, the most miserable physical misery I was ever in was in Australia in a 65 mile march with some shoes that didn't fit. They were old Army shoes they gave us that we weren't used to wearing and most of them didn't fit, especially mine. On the march, you would blister your feet and then burst the blisters, then you would have blood in your shoes. I was trying to be an example for my men you know and that was the most physical misery I ever had in the war was that 65 mile march. The

most frightening experience was the incident on the Calhoun with the aerial bombs and aviation gasoline.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's a long march.

Mr. Wilson

Well they did have to test us to see if we were ready to go back to war, so we read later.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else you recall.

Mr. Wilson

After reading all the post war critics and personal observations, I am shocked and disappointed in the apparent incompetence of some of the junior officers and the fact that some of our meanest jobs might not have been necessary.

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