

**National Museum of the Pacific War**

**Center for Pacific War Studies**

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

**Charles Watson**

**United States Marine Corps, Guam/Iwo Jima, Pacific War, World War II**

Date of Interview:

February 18, 2005

**National Museum of the Pacific War**  
**Fredericksburg, Texas**

**Interview with Charles Watson**  
**United States Marine Corps, Guam/Iwo Jima, Pacific War, World War II**

**Mr. Lindley:** Tell us your name.

**Mr. Watson:** My name is Charles Watson and I'm from Odessa, Texas. Live there and I had a fiftieth anniversary just the other day.

**Mr. Lindley:** Wonderful.

**Mr. Watson:** I used to live in Columbia, South Carolina. That's where I decided to join the Marine Corps because Port Jackson didn't look too good to me so I didn't want to go into the Army. I thought I'd be too seasick to join the Navy. The Air Force you had to (?). So I looked to join the Marine Corps. I thought that'd be the best outfit. They'd probably take care of me better than anything else.

**Mr. Lindley:** How old were you when you joined?

**Mr. Watson:** Twenty-two.

**Mr. Lindley:** What year was that?

**Mr. Watson:** 1943. I think that's right. I went to San Diego for boot training. Then I went to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. That's where one of my humorous incidents occurred. I had a week-end leave and I went home which was not too far from Camp Lejeune, to Columbia, South Carolina. We tried to get back to Camp Lejeune from South Carolina. A boy told us he'd be picking us up and taking us there. I kept waiting and looking at the clock. It was one o'clock, two o'clock. I said, "We're not going to make it." Finally, we got in the car and left and got there just about the time we were supposed to have inspection. Here I was very ill prepared to have inspection this early in the morning. I just had walked into camp when they called inspection. The sergeant who was in charge took my rifle, as he did each one of them, opened the bolt up—nothing in it. He said, "Where are the guts of this thing?" (laughs) Everybody got a laugh out of that. Saved me too much embarrassment.

**Mr. Lindley:** How long were you at Camp Lejeune?

**Mr. Watson:** Several months. I left there for Camp Pendleton. Shipped out from Pendleton to Guam. We just stayed there briefly and sailed to Eniwetok.

That's where something else occurred. We had almost run out of water. It was hot. Everything else was hot except beer. When we stopped at Eniwetok, they brought up the beer. It was cold. The first cold drink we'd had in several days. You get tired of that hot stuff that you're drinking. That revived us. Made us live, that's about all. We were running out of food, too. All we had was spinach. For breakfast. (laughs)

We took off from Eniwetok and went to Guam then. Beautiful island. We passed by Agana not too far from where they unloaded ships. By truck we went on in to a village called Talofofu. They said it was a restricted area, Talofofu is; don't go there. Some of the natives came up to us. They'd climb up those coconut trees like monkeys and brought the coconuts down. We tried to make coconut wine, fermented. It wasn't too good. They did bring a pig into camp. The natives did and cooked it for us. I was in the select group allowed to eat it. They didn't have enough for the whole battalion. We had, not sake wine, but coconut wine.

We stayed there until about time for Iwo Jima. They told us that we would be preparing for an invasion. On the way over, we had these tin cups to drink out of, hot as blue blazes, but it was a good cup of coffee. Stayed up all night, couldn't sleep. We got in close to Iwo Jima and saw these Navy ships. I think it was six hundred of them. They were firing over our head as we went through all the advance. Ships that were out there were pounding Iwo Jima. I said, "How in the world could anybody live through all of that which we saw?" The whole island was on fire. They kept coming out of those caves. These fellows said, "Look at those guys coming out of those caves." Even after we bombarded. They said, "How did they do it?" We couldn't figure it out. Flame throwers finally took care of it.

We saw the flag go up. All of a sudden, when that did go up, everybody in the Navy I think that was out there, gave a big holler. They continued blowing the horns and hollering and jumping up and carrying on because that flag was up there.

We left there and we thought we were going to go to Okinawa. We didn't get to there because they said we had enough on Iwo Jima.

**Mr. Lindley:** How long were you on Iwo Jima?

**Mr. Watson:** Thirty days.

**Mr. Lindley:** When did you land? What day did you land on Iwo Jima?

**Mr. Watson:** I didn't keep up with it quite that much, but I think about the second day. I wasn't on the initial invasion. There was enough going on as it was.

Someone said there was enough flak that you could hold up your hand and it would cut it off. That's how close it was to us. You could hear this missile come in. By the sound you could tell how far away it was or how close it was to you. One of my friends in the foxhole with me got tired of it and he said, "I'm going after those Japs." I took him by the seat off his pants and dragged him back into the foxhole. I didn't know what action he was going to take.

Things calmed down a little bit. Toward morning the mortars kept coming in until it was after twelve o'clock, I'm sure. Finally made it to sleep. Anyway, that's about the extent of it. Not much you can tell other than what I've told you about which did happen while I was on Iwo Jima. Except maybe one incident. It started raining and my friend who I'd pulled in the foxhole with me said, "There's a batch of stuff laying on the beach over there. It's cold." So we went up there and found us some jeans that I put on. Dried out that way.

I guess I could tell you some more things about the flares coming in over us and the 105s how they'd deafen you. They had a crack to them that hurt your ear drums. You couldn't hardly put anything in your ears to stop it.

**Mr. Lindley:** You landed on the beach and then you worked your way to the North?

**Mr. Watson:** At that time, when we got there it was near the airport. In fact, there were two airports but this was the main one. One of my friends that had a truck was driving through and a mortar landed right behind him. One right after the other. When they took Iwo Jima a friend of mine had a bulldozer in the engineer battalion. He started making a road up around Iwo Jima to the top of it. His bulldozer got too fishy or something, anyway it went over the top and rolled down.

**Mr. Lindley:** Oh, my goodness.

**Mr. Watson:** Didn't hurt him. He jumped out about that time. I'd be interested to know if anybody could do a thing like that. One other thing: When we were there I did not know, they told us the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division did not go into Iwo Jima. The boys that were coming over behind us, we were teasing them, "Where have you been all this time?" They went on to the front lines. We got behind about this time. Later on, about the tenth day they broke the Japanese back. What you call the main front line. When we got through with that everything went downhill for the Japanese. It was done at night. First time they ever fought there at night. When the Marines woke up, there were Japs everywhere. The Japanese were very surprised that we did that and did break the line where you got through.

**Mr. Lindley:** Were you a rifleman?

**Mr. Watson:** Yes, a rifleman. But you'd never find anybody to shoot at. First day or so they told us, "Be careful because the Japs will crawl into the foxhole." That wasn't a very comforting thought, was it?

**Mr. Lindley:** No.

**Mr. Watson:** I never did see one of them. In fact, the only Jap I saw was the old man coming out of Mount Surabachi. All the boys said, "Don't shoot him." They felt sorry for the old man and they didn't hurt him. Brought him into camp. Another good act toward the Marines: They had a Japanese on a stretcher and brought him in and he was taken care of. It wasn't all bad for the Japs.

When we went back to Guam, we stayed there for a few days and they told us that the atomic bomb had fallen. We went to Sasebo, Japan as occupational forces. My job turned out to be supplying the water. We built a shower deal for the boys to take a shower. They weren't too sure about the water system there in Japan. My job was to clear up all of it because it had been bombed out. The Air Force had hit everything but the military. Destroyed the town.

After we got there, we started making friends with the Japanese. Some of them did not. They just had a bad attitude toward them. I didn't think they were that bad. In fact, they welcomed us and just treated us like we were kings almost of the island. You know how they had superstitions. Had to be broken down. The way it was done is by the generosity of the Marines. Not only just candy bars but the friendliness we showed toward them. Had the job of trying to bring the Japanese to our side. I think it helped.

**Mr. Lindley:** I'm sure it did.

**Mr. Watson:** In fact, one family following the same old tradition, asked me if I could take one of their little daughters home with me. I told them, "We don't do that." "You won't? Just to work in your house." "No, that won't look right. I can't do that." They kept on until finally they gave up on me. I said, "I don't think I'll go back there anymore." (laughs)  
Then I met a fellow who was a Japanese colonel in the Army who had been in China and had received a reward of a tin box of cigarettes in Japanese. He gave that to me. Saucers and cups and deals like that. I got about six or eight of those. I brought those home with me. I sent two Japanese rifles and two bayonets and a saber—it didn't have the handle on it but it had the blade and everything looked good—I sent those home. I had two kimonos. One I sent to the girlfriend and one to my mother. They called that "KI-mono" which is kimono in Japanese. Then I had another friend who was Japanese about my age. He took me around to different places. One was a schoolhouse. Children were singing a little song. You want to hear it?

**Mr. Lindley:** Yes.

**Mr. Watson:** *Sings a song in Japanese.*

**Mr. Lindley:** The tune sounds good. What does it mean?

**Mr. Watson:** A grandmother and a little boy are out in the rain. He was walking around and skipping around in wooden shoes. That's what this is about.

**Mr. Lindley:** Cute.

**Mr. Watson:** A native song is "Sakura." *Sings the song in Japanese.* You're going to say, "How do you remember all of that?"

**Mr. Lindley:** Did you learn to speak Japanese?

**Mr. Watson:** Some, yes. We were going around a little turn in the road there and this Japanese woman was on the corner selling tangerines. I was the only one who could speak any Japanese at all. I asked her *in Japanese*, "How much is it?" She said, "?." I gave it to her. I didn't think she could speak any English at all. "You speak Japanese very well." She understood all the time. "You speak Japanese very well." (laughs)

**Mr. Lindley:** How long were you there in the occupation forces?

**Mr. Watson:** About six months.

**Mr. Lindley:** When you finished that were you discharged?

**Mr. Watson:** Went to San Francisco and was discharged.

**Mr. Lindley:** Where did you live the rest of your life?

**Mr. Watson:** I had been going to the university so I finished my work there at the University of South Carolina. Then I went to Texas for further training and that's where I've been ever since.

**Mr. Lindley:** I see. What did you get your degree in?

**Mr. Watson:** Education. I had taken geology and just needed to ride up there for dissertation. It was going to be too expensive. I couldn't afford it. Anyway, they said there were four hundred and some-odd fellows who wanted to be a geologist who were getting degrees in the summer but there was only one opening for us. That didn't sound too good. So, I went into education instead.

**Mr. Lindley:** Were you a teacher?

**Mr. Watson:** I was a teacher.

**Mr. Lindley:** Where did you teach?

**Mr. Watson:** Most of the time in Odessa.

**Mr. Lindley:** What did you teach?

**Mr. Watson:** Fifth grade.

**Mr. Lindley:** Fifth grade.

**Mr. Watson:** Somebody said, "We needed a man teacher." At that time there weren't very many.

**Mr. Lindley:** Right.

**Mr. Watson:** I enjoyed it because I had a real good superintendent, Dorothy Prince. She laid out what was expected, what to do in teaching and how to do it. Which took a lot of the worry off of me, the new teacher.

**Mr. Lindley:** Right. How many years did you teach?

**Mr. Watson:** Thirty-six.

**Mr. Lindley:** Thirty-six years.

**Mr. Watson:** And I had three years' of service time that added to my retirement. That gave me thirty-nine years which is how you get paid. Besides a master's degree, which I've got, too.

**Mr. Lindley:** That's wonderful. Did you ever go back to Iwo Jima or over there at any time?

**Mr. Watson:** No. It came out here several years ago about they were going to have the last chance of going to Iwo Jima and Guam. But they wanted about \$2000 a person. To take my wife it would be a little expensive. That's not counting incidentals. But now it's closed.

**Mr. Lindley:** Right.

**Mr. Watson:** I'd kind of liked to have seen it. To see what we went through.

**Mr. Lindley:** Any other stories that you would like to share with us of things that might have happened to you either there at Iwo Jima or afterwards?

**Mr. Watson:** Well, one case probably. They had a test given in boot camp. I think that's what got me out of it. They were going to give me some more training. They put me in the engineers. I got a pretty good grade on that. I got in the engineer department and this is how I got into the separate engineer battalion. I don't know, I'd have to talk to somebody—nobody seemed to know what that is—a separate engineer battalion. It's not attached to any particular unit but you float to where they need you. What division you might want to be in.

There was a case where Colonel Hall was the commanding officer. They called him Col. Hall and His 999 Thieves. One thing, a major came up and parked his jeep and he didn't get back to his jeep because it was gone.  
(laughs)

**Unidentified:** Sounds like a Marine, doesn't it?

**Mr. Lindley:** In the Navy we call that comshaw.

**Unidentified:** The Army jeeps were most of the ones that you'd get, is that right? Mostly get Army stuff rather than Navy or other Marine Corps stuff?

**Mr. Watson:** Yes. I know of one disastrous thing. At Camp Lejeune they had poison ivy. Oh, I had the worst case of it. I had to take shots. I got over it. Of course, one engineer poison ivy didn't bother. I could just pass by out in the road and I'd catch it.

**Mr. Lindley:** Any other stories that you'd like to share that you can think of?

**Mr. Watson:** There's one thing. I did get to see Nagasaki. It had been bombed out. I took pictures of the children. That was about thirty miles from Sasebo. They took us around all over the city. It surprised me how powerful the thing was to knock over headstones in a graveyard. Here are these Japanese out there, some of them, just a few, going through where they had lived. I guess they were looking for some of their belongings. I don't see how they could dig through it. But then they noticed (?). It didn't bother him. There was sort of a mountain that shielded them. These people on this side of the mountain, they were the ones that escaped. They maybe got some of the radiation. We went and visited him; talked to him.

**Mr. Lindley:** How many months or weeks was it after the bomb was dropped that you were there? How long afterwards was that approximately?



**Mr. Watson:** About two weeks. Very shortly.

**Mr. Lindley:** Very shortly after the bomb had been dropped.

**Mr. Watson:** They didn't waste much time. We had been previously assigned probably to invade Japan. That's what we were prepared for. We lost some men getting ready for that.

**Mr. Lindley:** Do you have any questions?

**Unidentified:** No, it's wonderful. Wonderful story. Wonderful experiences that you've related. Thank you.

**Mr. Watson:** Before my voice got bad on me, in teaching I could tell them about what happened. What your experiences were. After all this time, over sixty years ago--?

**Unidentified:** Yes, sir.

**Mr. Watson:** You forget a lot.

**Mr. Lindley:** Did you have any problems with bad dreams?

**Mr. Watson:** Yeah. About a year. I think that's common, wasn't it?

**Mr. Lindley:** Yes, it was. Some men still have them.

**Mr. Watson:** I don't think I had as bad experience as some of them. Most of what we got was mortar. I guess one other amusing thing about it. A newspaper man came to the island and rifle shots came in, kicking up around us. He took off. He didn't stay around at all.

**Mr. Lindley:** Too hot for him.

**Mr. Watson:** Too hot for him. That wasn't anything to what we'd seen.

**Mr. Lindley:** We certainly thank you for taking your time to come and visit with us and to tell us your story. As I said, what we will do is this will get transcribed at some point. I don't know how long it's going to take because it's all done by people who are volunteering their time to do this. But we will get it done and we'll send you, at your address, a copy.

**Mr. Watson:** You know that there were 30,000 by the end of the first day, Marines on that island. You'll have to get hold of them. That's a bunch. Probably won't get that many.

**Mr. Lindley:** No. We've done probably from the Iwo Jima experience, we've probably done maybe a hundred, maybe more. But we've done almost two thousand interviews so far. Some of them have been Iwo Jima; some have been others. But here in the last couple of days we've probably done a hundred or so.

**Mr. Watson:** Iwo Jima?

**Mr. Lindley:** Yes. There are a lot of people here in town today. We're pleased to have so many to share their stories with us.

**Mr. Watson:** If it helped any, I'm glad I did it.

**Mr. Lindley:** Thank you for doing it.

**Proof**

Bonnie Day Rush

February 22, 2011

Dublin, Texas

Tape1324