

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

THE NIMITZ MUSEUM

PRESENTS

AN ORAL HISTORY BY

KENNETH HENRY ROOT

INTERVIEWER - STEVE WHITSON

TAPE NUMBER 1352

EXPERIENCE AS A MEDICAL CORPSMAN
ON GUAM

THIS IS STEVE WHITSON. TODAY IS FEBRUARY 18, 2005. I AM INTERVIEWING MR. KENNETH H. ROOT. THIS INTERVIEW IS TAKING PLACE IN FREDERICKSBURG, TEXAS. THIS INTERVIEW IS IN SUPPORT OF THE CENTER FOR PACIFIC WAR STUDIES, ARCHIVES OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR, TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE, FOR THE PRESERVATION OF INFORMATION RELATED TO THIS SITE.

KENNETH THERE ARE SEVERAL THINGS WE WILL KIND OF GO THROUGH FIRST OF ALL. WHERE AND WHEN WERE YOU BORN?

KENNETH

I WAS BORN MARCH 20, 1926 IN OVERBROOK, KANSAS ON A FARM.

STEVE

WHO WERE YOUR PARENTS?

KENNETH

MY PARENTS WERE MABEL AND CHARLES ROOT.

STEVE

DID YOU HAVE ANY SIBLINGS?

KENNETH

I HAVE TWO BROTHERS. I HAVE ONE YOUNGER AND ONE OLDER BROTHER. THERE WERE THREE OF US. LATER ON, I MARRIED AND HAD A COUPLE OF CHILDREN.

STEVE

DID YOU GO TO SCHOOL THERE?

KENNETH

I WENT TO SCHOOL IN BRUBACKER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, WHICH WAS ALL EIGHT GRADES IN ONE ROOM. I STARTED TO SCHOOL AT FIVE. IN 1938, WE LEFT KANSAS AND WENT TO FORT WORTH, TEXAS, JUST LIKE THE GRAPES OF WRATH, WITH A TWO WHEEL TRAILER. WE HAD EVERYTHING WE OWNED ON THAT TWO WHEELED TRAILER. MY MOTHER HAD DIVORCED AND SHE HAD THREE CHILDREN AND SHE HAD JUST REMARRIED. WE WERE MOVING IN 1938 TO FORT WORTH; FROM THE COUNTRY TO THE BIG CITY WAS QUITE A LEAP. PART OF OUR FAMILY, MENTIONING GRAPES OF WRATH, PART OF OUR FAMILY, MY MOTHER CAME FROM A FAMILY OF TWELVE AND PART OF THIS FAMILY OF TWELVE, THESE WOULD BE MY AUNTS AND UNCLES, THEY WENT TO CALIFORNIA, WE WENT TO TEXAS AND OTHERS WENT TO COLORADO AND WORKED. WORK WAS SO SCARCE IN THOSE DAYS. IT WAS JUST LIKE THE GRAPES OF WRATH.

STEVE

WHEN DID YOU ENTER THE MILITARY?

KENNETH

I ENTERED THE MILITARY IN 1942 IN HOUSTON, TEXAS. I WAS IN HIGH SCHOOL. I WAS ONLY 15 YEARS OLD. I WAS DISCOURAGED. MY STEP-FATHER HAD JUST GONE BACK INTO THE MILITARY. OF COURSE. PEARL HARBOR WAS IN 1941.

STEVE

WHAT SERVICE WAS HE IN?

KENNETH

HE WAS IN THE NAVY. HE HAD BEEN IN BEFORE IN WORLD WAR I, SO HE WENT BACK IN AS A CHIEF RADIOMAN. ANYWAY, I DROPPED OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL. I TOLD MY MOTHER----- MY HIGH SCHOOL DID HAVE ROTC. SO I DID HAVE A YEAR OF ROTC. I DROPPED OUT OF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL AND I TOLD MY MOTHER THAT I WAS NOT GOING BACK TO SCHOOL. I SAID I WAS GOING TO GO IN THE SERVICE. A NEIGHBOR BOY WANTED TO GO IN TOO. I SIGNED UP AS SEVENTEEN. MARCH 11, TWO WEEKS BEFORE I WAS SIXTEEN.

THEN, I LEFT HOUSTON MARCH 11. I GOT TO SAN DIEGO AND ON THE WAY, I HAD A SANDWICH: THIS OF COURSE, WAS MY FIRST TRAIN RIDE TOO. I BOUGHT A SANDWICH FROM AN INDIAN, I BELIEVE WAS IN NEW MEXICO. IT UPSET MY STOMACH. I GOT BACK ON THE TRAIN AND I REALLY GOT SICK.

I GOT OFF THE TRAIN IN SAN DIEGO AFTER A COUPLE OF DAYS AND HADN'T REALLY GOTTEN SICK YET BUT I WAS FEELING BAD. WE ARRIVED IN SAN DIEGO AT THE BOOT CAMP, GOT OFF AND WENT INTO OUR PLACE TO GET OUR SHOTS. HERE WE ARE. PROBABLY 180-190 PEOPLE STANDING THERE ALL NAKED, WITH OUR CLOTHES ALL PILED UP IN FRONT OF US AND I KEPT GETTING SICKER AND SICKER AND STEVE, I SAID I GOTTA GO TO THE BATHROOM, I GOTTA GO TO THE BATHROOM. I WAS A LITTLE SKINNY KID. I WEIGHED ABOUT 125 AT SIX FOOT TWO. YOU CAN IMAGINE HOW SKINNY I WAS. HERE I WAS WITH ALL THESE MEN AND I WAS SICK. I SAID, "WHERE'S THE BATHROOM?" OF COURSE, A SMART ALEC NAVY GUY COMES UP AND SAYS, "WHAT DO YOU MEAN BATHROOM" DO YOU MEAN THE HEAD?" I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT A HEAD WAS. I SAID, "WHATEVER". ABOUT THAT TIME, I THREW UP. THESE GUYS STARTED GRABBING THEIR CLOTHES AND EVERYTHING ELSE. WELL, THEY TOOK ME TO THE BATHROOM PRETTY QUICK THEN.

ANYWAY, THAT WAS MY FIRST DEAL. AND STEVE, I BECAME SO HOMESICK AFTER GETTING ALL THOSE SHOTS AND THINGS. THE FIRST NIGHT I CRIED AND THE SECOND NIGHT, I PROBABLY CRIED A LITTLE BIT LESS. I WROTE MY MOTHER A SAD LETTER AND SAID, "MOM, TELL 'EM HOW OLD I AM. THE

NEXT THING, I WANT TO GET OUT OF THIS THING. I'M COMING HOME."

THE THIRD DAY, A LITTLE MORE NERVE. OH WELL, I'LL JUST WAIT ANOTHER DAY. ABOUT THE 4TH OR 5TH DAY, I DECIDED, YOU KNOW, I CAN COMPETE WITH THESE GUYS AND I'LL BE A MAN AFTER ALL AND NEVER SAID ANOTHER WORD AND BECAME HAPPY. ANYWAY, THAT WAS MY FIRST EXPERIENCE. I'M HAPPY TO SHARE IT WITH YOU. I'M SURE THERE A LOT OF OTHER GUYS WHO WENT IN UNDERAGE AND PROBABLY HAD THE SAME TYPE HAPPEN TO THEM ALL.

STEVE

AND BEING THAT FAR AWAY FROM HOME.

KENNETH

AND BEING THAT FAR AWAY FROM HOME. YES.

STEVE

ACROSS THE COUNTRY AND IN A DIFFERENT SPOT.

KENNETH

OH YEAH, YEAH AND YOU KNOW ONE OF THE THINGS TOO THAT HAPPENED, THE NEIGHBOR BOY THAT I JOINED WITH WHO WAS 17, WHEN WE GOT ON THE TRAIN AND STARTED TO SAN DIEGO, HE WAS WITH OLDER PEOPLE THEN. HE AND I WERE REAL BUDDIES BECAUSE WE LIVED RIGHT NEXT DOOR TO ONE ANOTHER. HE WAS KIND OF A SHORT PERSON. HE KIND OF ATTACHED HIMSELF TO ME, I GUESS. WE GOT ON THAT TRAIN, IT WAS LIKE HE NEVER KNEW ME AGAIN. THAT WAS A LONESOME FEELING AND THAT BEGAN TO GET TO ME THINKING, WHAT HAVE I DONE?

STEVE

I'M REALLY ON MY OWN.

KENNETH

THAT'S THE WAY IT WAS WHEN I STARTED OUT.

STEVE

HOW WAS THE TRAINING LIKE.

KENNETH

THE TRAINING, WELL, AT THAT TIME, THIS IS MARCH OF '42, PEARL HARBOR WAS IN DECEMBER.

THREE MONTHS AFTER, THERE WAS 180 MEN, THREE COMPANIES IF I REMEMBER CORRECTLY, THERE WERE THREE COMPANIES A DAY COMING IN TO SAN DIEGO TO THE BOOT CAMP. NOW, THAT WAS JUST ONE BOOT CAMP. THERE WERE OTHER BOOT CAMPS ALL OVER THE COUNTRY. THAT'S HOW MANY MEN WERE COMING IN. BOOT CAMP USUALLY LASTS FOR 8 OR 9 WEEKS. AT THE END OF A WEEK AND A HALF, THEY TOOK FIFTY MEN OUT OF OUR COMPANY AND SENT THEM TO SEA. THE REST OF US, BY THAT TIME HAD TAKEN ALL THE TESTS AND SO ON. AT THE END OF TWO WEEKS, THEY SENT US OUT TO OUR VARIOUS SCHOOLS, RADIOMEN WENT----- I WAS A HOSPITAL CORPMAN SO I WAS ABLE TO GET IN THAT SCHOOL SO THAT'S WHERE WE WENT. I WAS IN BOOT CAMP PROBABLY A LITTLE OVER TWO WEEKS. NOT LONG. MOST OF THAT TIME, WE WERE WAITING ON ORDERS. WHAT WE WERE DOING WAS JUST PREPARING TO GET THE SHOTS AND TAKING THE TESTS AND DOING A LITTLE DRILLING. WITH THE R O T C THAT I HAD, EVEN THOUGH I WAS JUST A KID, I KNEW HOW TO MARCH AND DO OTHER THINGS THESE OTHER BOYS DIDN'T KNOW. IT MADE ME FEEL EVEN BETTER. IN FACT, I THOUGHT THEY MIGHT CHOOSE ME TO BE ONE OF THE LEADERS.

STEVE

THE YOUNGEST MAN IN CHARGE.

KENNETH

YEAH, THE YOUNGEST MAN IN CHARGE. I DIDN'T TELL THOSE GUYS HOW OLD I WAS. I TRIED TO ACT SEVENTEEN.

STEVE

HOW LONG TO BOOT CAMP?

KENNETH

AFTER TWO WEEKS IN BOOT CAMP, THEN I WENT TO HOSPITAL CORPS SCHOOL IN BALBOA PARK. IT WAS A SIX WEEKS COURSE. DURING THAT TIME, I GOT THE MUMPS AND HAD TO GO IN THE HOSPITAL. I LOST PART OF MY TESTICLES AS A RESULT OF THE MUMPS. I JUST HAD A TERRIBLE TIME.

AFTER ABOUT SEVEN WEEKS, IN HOSPITAL CORPS SCHOOL. I DIDN'T KNOW, LIKE A LOT OF OTHER PEOPLE, WHEN THEY SENT ME TO HOSPITAL CORPS SCHOOL, I SAID, "WHAT IS THAT?" THEY SAID, "YOU ARE GOING TO BE A DOCTOR." I SAID, "A DOCTOR? I CAN'T EVEN STAND THE SIGHT OF BLOOD." I DIDN'T THINK I COULD. FROM THERE, I WENT TO CORPUS CHRISTI NAVAL AIR STATION AND DID MY HOSPITAL WORK THERE, TRAINING. ABOUT 6 OR 7 WEEKS LATER, THEY SENT ME TO THE 3RD MARINE DIVISION IN NORTH CAROLINA. AT THAT TIME, THEY HAD THE 1ST AND 2ND MARINE DIVISIONS. THEY ONLY HAD TWO DIVISIONS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE WAR. THEY WERE BOTH SHOT UP ON GUADALCANAL SO THEY

FORMED THE 3RD. I WAS ONE OF THEM THEY CHOSE AND SOME OTHER BOYS THERE WERE FROM TEXAS. THEY TRANSFERRED US TO NORTH CAROLINA INTO THE 3RD MARINE DIVISION.

AFTER LEAVING NORTH CAROLINA, WE WENT TO SAN DIEGO, CAMP PENDLETON, TRAINED THERE. THE 3RD MARINES DID A LOT OF TRAINING THERE AT CAMP PENDLETON. WE LEFT THERE AND WENT TO NEW ZEALAND. PART OF 3RD MARINES WENT TO NEW ZEALAND, PART OF THEM WENT TO SAMOA FOR TRAINING. ANYWAY, THEY DIVIDED THE DIVISION UP. WE LEFT ON A SHIP CALLED, THE *LURLINE*, WHICH WAS A SHIP THAT HAD BEEN CONVERTED INTO A TROOP SHIP. DIDN'T HAVE ENOUGH TROOPSHIPS THEN EITHER. THERE I WAS ON A LUXURY LINER HEADING OUT. YOU CAN IMAGINE. I AM IN AWE ALL THE TIME. A LOT OF GUYS WERE OLDER THAN I WAS. I GUESS THE OLDER GUYS———SEE, I NEVER THOUGHT I WAS IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO GET KILLED ANYWAY, SO I NEVER WAS AFRAID OF ANYTHING LIKE SOME OF THEM WERE. SOME HAD FAMILIES AT HOME OR WERE A LOT OLDER THAN I WAS, HAD SOMETHING TO LOOK FORWARD TO. I DIDN'T. I KIND OF WENT ALONG AND EVERYTHING WAS FINE TO ME. THEY GOT SEASICK AND IT DIDN'T BOTHER ME ANY.

ANYWAY, THIS *LURLINE* WAS SO FAST THAT WE DIDN'T EVEN HAVE A CONVOY. THIS WAS IN '42. I WAS JUST A KID BUT I DO REMEMBER WE WENT FAST ENOUGH THAT THE U-BOATS COULDN'T BOTHER US. WE WENT TO NEW ZEALAND AND TRAINED THERE.

A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE *LURLINE*. AT NIGHT, NO LIGHTS ON DECK. NOT AT ALL. NO SMOKING CIGARETTES BECAUSE OF THE LIGHT. AT THAT TIME, HERE I AM 16 YEARS OLD NOW. I HAD A PIPE. NOBODY SMOKED IN THOSE DAYS. WE ALWAYS HAD SOME "BULL DURHAM" WHEN YOU WERE A KID ON THE FARM. EVERYBODY ROLLED THEIR OWN CIGARETTES. I HAD THIS OLD PIPE, AN OLD CUT DOWN PIPE LIKE THAT. BOY, I FELT GOOD SMOKING THAT THING. I WENT OUT ON DECK THAT NIGHT WITH THAT DARN PIPE AND I HAD IT LIT AND WENT OUT ON DECK AND I PUFFED THAT PIPE AND THE COALS SHOT UP LIKE THAT AND AN M P ARRESTED ME OUT ON THE PACIFIC. I SAID, "WHAT HAVE I DONE?" HE SAID, YOU HAVE A LIGHT. YOU ARE SIGNALING SOMEBODY." THEN I FELT LIKE I HAD THIS DAMN PIPE. HE ARRESTED ME AND TOOK ME IN AND TOLD THE DUTY OFFICER AND SAID, "HERE IS A MAN TRYING TO SIGNAL A SUBMARINE." MADE UP LIKE THAT. I SAID, "I'M JUST SMOKING MY PIPE." THEY SAID I COULDN'T GET OFF THE SHIP. HERE WE ARE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE OCEAN. I REMEMBER THIS. YOU ARE CONFINED TO QUARTERS, HERE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE OCEAN. THEY WERE HAVING FUN WITH ME.

WE GOT TO NEW ZEALAND AND TRAINED THERE. IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL PLACE. WE WENT UP INTO THE MOUNTAINS. ONE OF THE THINGS THAT I REMEMBER ABOUT IT WAS THEY RAISE A LOT OF SHEEP THERE AND THEY HAVE A LOT OF MUTTON. THEY FED US A LOT OF MUTTON. DOWN ON THE FARM WHERE I WAS BORN AND RAISED, YOU DIDN'T GO TO SOMEBODY'S HOUSE AND NOT EAT. HELL, IF YOU WERE HUNGRY, YOU ATE. YOU DIDN'T TURN DOWN FOOD. WE DIDN'T SAY WE DIDN'T LIKE THIS OR THAT, WE DIDN'T PUT UP WITH IT IN OUR FAMILY. THE MUTTON DIDN'T BOTHER ME. IT HAD A SMELL. I THOUGHT IT WAS GOOD. A LOT OF THESE MARINES, I'M TELLING YOU, THEY JUST COULDN'T STAND IT AND WE

ALWAYS HAD PEANUT BUTTER AND BUTTER AND JELLY ON THE TABLE WHILE WE WERE TRAINING THERE. SOME OF THE MARINES WOULD CLOSE THEIR NOSES AND EAT SOME WHEN WE HAD MUTTON.

ANOTHER THING THAT HAPPENED THAT I REMEMBER. ONE TIME I WAS GIVEN THE DETAIL, WE WERE BY A BIG RANCH WITH A LOT OF CATTLE OUT THERE AND A COW DIED BY COMPANY "B", RIGHT ACROSS THE FENCE. THE M.D., DOCTOR WOODY, WHO WAS IN CHARGE OF US SAID, "KENNETH, GET YOU SOME MARINES. WELL, WE HAD SOME MARINES THAT WEREN'T TOP NOTCH. THEY WERE ALWAYS USED FOR DETAILS LIKE CARRYING STRETCHERS, THAT TYPE THING. "YOU GET YOURSELF ABOUT SIX MARINES AND GO OUT THERE AND TAKE CARE OF THAT COW." I SAID, "I NEVER BURIED A COW BEFORE." YOU COULDN'T MOVE THIS THING SO WE DUG A HOLE, THEY GOT BEHIND THAT COW. WE DUG A BIG HOLE. I DIDN'T LET THEM QUIT UNTIL THEY WERE DOWN THERE. WE JUST PICKED IT UP AND POURED IT IN THE HOLE. I WAS REALLY PROUD. I THOUGHT IT WAS VERY UNIQUE. I NEVER BURIED A COW BEFORE IN MY LIFE. THEY GAVE ME THE JOB TO DO IT.

SOME OF THE TRAINING WE HAD THERE I THOUGHT WAS INTERESTING. WE HAD A LOT OF 60 MILE HIKES, 20 MILES PER DAY FOR 3 DAYS. NEVER MORE THAN THAT. THAT WAS SOMETHING, ESPECIALLY FOR A CORPSMAN. WHEN YOU MARCHED 20 MILES PER DAY, YOU CAN IMAGINE EVERY TIME YOU HAD A BREAK, THE GUYS THAT HAD SORE FEET AND BLISTERS. WHEN YOU SAT DOWN TO REST, YOU DIDN'T HAVE TIME. YOU WERE FIXING SOMEBODY'S FEET OR DOING THIS OR THAT ALL THE TIME. THAT WAS MOST OF OUR TRAINING.

THEN WE WENT TO GUADALCANAL. THE 1ST AND 2ND DIVISIONS WERE ALL SHOT UP AND THEY WERE REGROUPING. GUADALCANAL WAS PRETTY WELL SECURED. THE 3RD MARINES MOVED IN, IN THEIR PLACES SO THEY COULD GET NEW PEOPLE.

ONE OF THE THINGS THEY QUESTIONED WAS, DO YOU REMEMBER THAT WAS FUNNY. I WAS IN THE SUPPLY TENT WHILE WE WERE ON GUADALCANAL. WE DIDN'T HAVE TO SLEEP IN FOX HOLES THERE. WE SLEPT IN TENTS. MYSELF AND ANOTHER BOY WHOSE NAME WAS KING. WE SLEPT IN THE SUPPLY TENT. EVERYBODY HAD MOSQUITO NETS. THERE WAS LOTS OF MALARIA AND MILLIONS OF MOSQUITOES. IN FACT, WE EVEN HAD TO HAVE GUARDS, WE HAD TO HAVE PEOPLE COME IN TO CHECK YOUR TENT TO MAKE SURE YOU HAD YOUR MOSQUITO NETS TURNED IN. YOU WOULD BE SURPRISED HOW MANY PEOPLE DIDN'T CARE IF THEY GOT MALARIA BECAUSE THAT MEANT THEY WENT BACK TO THE STATES. I DIDN'T WANT TO GO BACK TO THE STATES. I DIDN'T HAVE SENSE ENOUGH TO WANT TO GET OUT OF THERE. I WANTED TO SEE WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN.

ONE NIGHT, I GOT IN MY MOSQUITO NET----- YOU KNOW HOW IT IS. HAVE YOU EVER SLEPT IN ONE BEFORE? THE MOSQUITO NET WOULD BE ABOUT THAT HIGH. YOU ARE LAYING HERE AND THE MOSQUITO NET WAS IN A FRAME THAT WENT OVER YOU. IN THE DAYTIME, YOU WOULD JUST THROW THAT OVER THE DEAL, OR YOU TUCK IT IN UNDER YOU MATTRESS TO KEEP THE MOSQUITOES OUT DURING THE DAYTIME. THAT NIGHT I GOT IN THERE STEVE, AND REMEMBER THIS WAS ON GUADALCANAL, AND I GOT INTO MY

DOGGONE TENT AND I REACHED OVER THERE AND STARTED TUCKING MY BEDDING IN LIKE THAT. LOOKED UP AND I'M TELLING YOU THERE WAS A BIG OLD SPIDER UP THERE, A BIG OLD WOLF SPIDER, I GUESS. THAT RASCAL WAS, I MEAN, THAT BIG AROUND, AND HE WAS RIGHT ABOVE ME, A FOOT AND A HALF FROM MY HEAD, LOOKING ME RIGHT IN THE EYE. I THOUGHT, MY GOD, HOW AM I GOING TO GET OUT OF THIS? I REACHED OVER AND I PULLED MY MOSQUITO NETTING OUT SO I KNEW I WAS GOING TO HAVE TO GET OUT OF THERE. NO WAY I COULD FIGHT THAT SPIDER THAT WAY. I PULLED EVERYTHING OUT AND WHEN I FELL OUT, I WOULDN'T PULL MY BUNK OVER OR ANYTHING. MY MOSQUITO NETTING WOULD GIVE WAY, WHICH I DID. I LUNGED OUT OF THERE AND I HIT THAT CENTER POLE AND OLD KING WAS SLEEPING ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THAT POST. HE THOUGHT THE JAPS WERE ON TOP OF US. HE SAID, "WHAT'S THE MATTER, WHAT'S THE MATTER?" HE WAS MORE FRIGHTENED THAT I WAS . WE NEVER DID KNOW WHERE THAT SPIDER WENT. I DIDN'T GET BACK IN THERE UNTIL I KNEW . I'M TELLING YOU I DIDN'T GET BACK IN THERE UNTIL I HAD THAT MOSQUITO NET CLEANED OUT. I NEVER DID FIND THAT SPIDER. I DON'T KNOW WHERE HE WENT BUT I'M SURE HE WAS AS SCARED AS I WAS. I REMEMBER THAT SO WELL.

STEVE

HOW LONG WERE YOU ON GUADALCANAL.

KENNETH

WE WERE ON GUADALCANAL FOR JUST A LITTLE WHILE, THEN BOUGAINVILLE. THE WAY I UNDERSTAND IT, THEY WANTED AN AIRFIELD ON BOUGAINVILLE, WHICH IS A GREAT BIG ISLAND. THEY USED THE 3RD MARINES TO GO UP AND STEVE. IT SEEMS TO ME LIKE THEY TOOK US UP ON----- IT WASN'T A TROOPSHIP AT ALL. IT WAS EITHER AN L S T OR SEEMS TO ME LIKE WE WENT UP ON WORLD WAR I DESTROYERS. IT WAS A FAST TRIP. THEY TOOK US UP THERE AND THERE WASN'T ANY BIG----- WE LANDED ON A PART OF THE ISLAND WHERE THERE WASN'T REALLY ANY FIGHTING TO GET ON THE SHORE. WE DIDN'T HAVE ANY OPPOSITION AT ALL THAT I REMEMBER. WHEN WE GOT ON SHORE, WE HEADED UP TO OUR PLACE THAT WE WERE SUPPOSED TO CLEAR OUT AND CLEAR A PLACE FOR THE AIRFIELD. I DON'T KNOW HOW BIG A SPOT IT WAS WHEN WE LANDED. THERE WAS SOME SWAMP. WE HAD TO GO THROUGH SWAMP. THE FIRST DAY AT NGHT, I DUG MY FOXHOLE. WE ALL KIND OF DUG OUR FOXHOLES TOGETHER. WE FOUND SOFT DIRT AND WE JUST DUG IN. THE WATER SEEPED UP LIKE WATER SEEPS UP IN A WELL SOMETIMES.

THE NEXT DAY, WE WERE STILL IN THAT SWAMP. EVERY NOW AND THEN YOU WOULD SEE A DEAD JAPANESE. THERE WEREN'T VERY MANY, BUT JUST A FEW, SNIPERS. ABOUT THE THIRD DAY IT SEEMS LIKE WE FINALLY GOT OUT OF THE SWAMP. WE WERE SITTING AROUND HAVING LUNCH WHEN THE FIRST BUNCH OF SNIPERS SHOT INTO OUR GROUP. THAT WAS THE FIRST TIME WE WERE UNDER FIRE, THAT I WAS AROUND ANYWAY.

I LAID DOWN AND GOT BEHIND AN OLD TREE AND ALL THE MARINES WERE LOOKING AROUND TO FIND WHO TO SHOOT AT. I'M HIDING BEHIND A LITTLE OLD TREE THAT WAS NO BIGGER THAN MY ARM. IT WASN'T VERY BIG. I THOUGHT, WHAT THE HELL? A GUY WANTS TO SHOOT ME. WHAT AM I HIDING BEHIND? THEN, I LOOKED AROUND AND A FEW OF THE MARINES----- WE JUST COULDN'T HIDE, THAT'S ALL.

ABOUT THAT TIME, I HEARD, "CORPSMAN" SO I LEFT, RAN OVER TO WHERE THIS WAS WHERE THERE WAS AN ARTILLERY OBSERVER. HE HAD BEEN SHOT IN THE STOMACH. I TOOK CARE OF HIM, BANDAGED HIM UP. THEN WE MOVED ON INTO BOUGAINVILLE. THE THING I REMEMBER ABOUT BOUGAINVILLE MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE THERE WERE AWFULLY BIG TREES AND EARTHQUAKES EVERY NOW AND THEN THAT WOULD REALLY SHAKE THE GROUND.

WE SET UP OUR PERIMETER. WE DID WHAT WE WERE SUPPOSED TO DO. WHAT THE MAP LOOKED LIKE I HAVE NO IDEA. WE WERE SITTING ON THE FRONT LINES FOR MAYBE TWO MONTHS. EVERYBODY SLEPT IN FOXHOLES AT NIGHT. WE SLEPT ON THE GROUND ALL THAT TIME. HOW IN THE WORLD DID WE DO IT? OF COURSE, I KNEW IT WAS WARM IN THE TROPICS BUT ALL THE TIME WE WERE THERE, WE HAD THREE OF US SLEPT IN THIS BIG OLD FOXHOLE. WE HAD IT COVERED OVER WITH LOGS AND STUFF BECAUSE WE WERE HOLDING THE LINE THERE.

THE ONLY TIME THE JAPANESE EVER ATTACKED US OR DID ANYTHING, PATROL MIGHT COME OVER WITH NOTHING REALLY. THAT WAS ABOUT ALL WE----- WE JUST SECURED THAT AIRFIELD AND PRETTY SOON THE ARMY CAME IN AND TOOK OVER OUR POSITION AND THEN WE MOVED BACK TO GUADALCANAL AND THEN WENT TO GUAM. THE NIGHT THEY MOVED IN THESE ARMY RANGERS, I REMEMBER WE MOVED OUT OF THE FOXHOLES BACK INTO AN AREA WHICH WAS SECURE AND WE DIDN'T HAVE TO DIG HOLES THEN.

ANYWAY, THESE GUYS CAME IN TO TAKE OVER OUR POSITION. YOU NEVER HEARD SO MUCH SHOOTING THAT NIGHT IN YOUR LIFE. THEY WERE ON THE FRONT LINE. EVERY SOUND THEY HEARD, THEY THOUGHT IT WAS THE JAPANESE AND THEY WERE PRIMED TO FIGHT. I SUPPOSE THIS WAS '43. WE GOT THE BIGGEST KICK OUT OF THAT BECAUSE HERE THE MARINES WERE PULLING BACK. NOBODY HAD FIRED A GUN FOR QUITE A WHILE. EVERYTHING WAS SO QUIET FOR OUR PATROLS THAT WENT OUT. WE THOUGHT, THOSE ARMY GUYS DON'T KNOW HOW TO DO THINGS. WE GOT THE BIGGEST KICK OUT OF THAT.

STEVE

THEY WERE GUNG HO.

KENNETH

THEY WANTED TO SHOOT SOMEBODY. THEY WANTED TO DO SOMETHING. WE LEFT THERE AND WENT BACK TO GUADALCANAL. STAYED THERE FOR A LITTLE WHILE, THEN WENT TO GUAM. ON THE WAY TO GUAM, WE GOT ON THESE TROOPSHIPS.

OH, ANOTHER THING THAT HAPPENED ON GUADALCANAL, WE DID A LOT OF TRAINING. BY THAT TIME THEY HAD A LOT OF TROOPSHIPS. YOU NEVER WALKED DOWN A GANGPLANK. YOU WENT DOWN A ROPE LADDER OFF A TROOPSHIP. ALWAYS UP AND DOWN, UP AND DOWN. ONE TIME WE WENT ON MANUEVERS THERE. THIS IS BEFORE GUAM. WE WENT ON MANUEVERS AND WE WENT BACK TO OUR SHIP AFTER WE GOT ON THE BEACH AND MADE OUR BEACH LANDING OVERTOOK GUAM, WHICH WASN'T GUAM. THAT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE OUR TRAINING. WE CAME BACK IN THESE HIGGINS BOATS. INSTEAD OF GOING UP THE ROPE LADDERS, THEY WANT US TO GO UP THE GANGPLANK. I NEVER KNEW WHY, BUT THEY DID. THE SEA WAS ROUGH. IT GOT ROUGH THAT DAY . HERE IS THE DAMN SHIP OVER HERE AND YOU ARE TRYING TO STEP OVER ON THIS THING AND WALK UP ON THE DECK. YOU CAN IMAGINE JUMPING ACROSS THERE IS TOUGH BUSINESS, JUST LIKE GETTING ON A DOCK WHEN YOU ARE ABOUT TO GET ON A BOAT TO FISH OR SOMETHING. ONE OLD BOY IN OUR OUTFIT, HE WAS CALLED—— WE CALLED HIM TURTLE BECAUSE HE PUT ON HIS HELMET, HE LOOKED JUST LIKE A TURTLE. THAT WAS HIS NICKNAME. OLD TURTLE GETS UP THERE, WE GOT ALL THESE GUYS IN THE HIGGINS BOAT NOW READY TO GET OUT OF THERE AND HE GETS UP THERE AND HE IS ABOUT TO LOSE IT AND EVERYBODY IS HOLLERING, "TURTLE, GET THE HELL OFF THERE. WHAT ARE YOU WAITING ON?" JUST ALL KINDS——FIFTEEN GUYS HOLLERING AT HIM. HE GETS SO CONFUSED. I'M TELLING YOU, WHEN HE JUMPED, TO GET THIS THING, IT WAS SIX FEET AWAY FROM THE THING WHEN HE JUMPED. HE WAS SO CONFUSED. I ALWAYS WONDERED, WITH A 30-30 ON YOUR BACK, WITH A STEEL HELMET, YOUR PACK ON YOUR BACK, WHAT EVER ELSE YOU HAD ON, AND YOUR BIG OLD COMAT BOOTS, WHAT HAPPENED IF YOU FELL IN THE WATER. OLD TURTLE DID. HE MISSED THAT GANGPLANK SIX FEET. HE SAID, "I'M GOING TO JUMP." HE HAD TO JUMP. THEY JUST EGGED HIM ON. HE HIT THAT WATER AND WENT UNDER AND BOBBED UP JUST LIKE A CORK.

IF HE HAD BEEN IN THERE AN HOUR, HE WOULD HAVE SUNK. I REMEMBER THAT SO MUCH JUST SEEING OLD TURTLE. THEY WERE JUST EATING HIM UP TO GET HIM OFF THE BOAT. THEN, HE MAKES A BAD MOVE AND JUMPS IN THE WATER ANYWAY.

STEVE

DID YOU CARRY A LOT OF EXTRA EQUIPMENT BEING A CORPSMAN?

KENNETH

YEAH, I CARRIED MY BAGS.

STEVE

YOU CARRIED WHAT EVERYBODY ELSE DID AND THEN YOU CARRIED YOUR BAG IN ADDITION TO WHAT EVERYBODY ELSE DID.

KENNETH

IT WAS JUST A POUCH THAT HUNG. IT WAS ABOUT THIS TALL. IT HAD ALL KINDS OF BANDAGES, EVERYTHING FOR FIRST AID IN THERE.

STEVE

BUT, YOU DIDN'T FALL IN THE WATER.

KENNETH

NO. I DIDN'T FALL IN THE WATER AT ALL. THEY GAVE US CARBINES. WHEN I FIRST WENT TO THE MARINES, THEY ISSUED US ----- CORPSMEN OF COURSE, LIKE OFFICERS, THEY DID HAVE '45's AT ONE TIME. IF I REMEMBER CORRECTLY, THEY DIDN'T WANT US TO WEAR 45's ANY MORE WAS BECAUSE THEY RECOGNIZED THEN THAT YOU WERE AN OFFICER, SOMEBODY SPECIAL, SO THEY WOULD SHOOT YOU FIRST. THEY GOT RID OF THAT. THEN THEY CAME OUT WITH A NEW WEAPON CALLED A REISING (SP???) GUN. IT WAS A LITTLE .45 GUN ABOUT THIS LONG. IT HAD A WIRE STOP ON IT. IT WAS CALLED A RISING (SP??) GUN BECAUSE WHEN YOU PRESSED THE TRIGGER, THE THING WOULD GO JUST LIKE THAT. (THE BARREL WOULD RISE) I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH MONEY THEY SPENT MAKING THOSE RISING GUNS BUT THEY ISSUED THEM TO US. WITHIN SIX WEEKS OR SO, THEY TOOK THEM BACK. I DON'T KNOW WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THEM. THEN, THEY GAVE US A CARBINE.

STEVE

YOU LIKED THE CARBINE?

KENNETH

THE CARBINE, YEAH. I NEVER REALLY HAD TO FIRE IT OR USE IT. ANYWAY, WE WENT BACK TO BOUGAINVILLE, THEN TO GUADALCANAL AND GOT ON OUR SHIPS AND HEADED TOWARD GUAM. STEVE, SAIPAN WAS GOING ON ABOUT THE SAME TIME. YOU KNEW ALL THIS. YOU DID HAVE THE NEWS ON BOARD SHIP. YOU KIND OF KNEW WHAT WAS TAKING PLACE AND YOU KNEW THEY WERE HITTING SIAPAN. WE WERE SUPPOSED TO HIT TWO WEEKS OR A WEEK LATER. THE JAPANESE FLEET CAME OUT. SO, THEY TOOK US ON THESE SHIPS. WE HAD A TERRIBLE ARMADA. I DON'T KNOW HOW MANY SHIPS WE HAD OUT THERE, PROBABLY 150 SHIPS, BATTLESHIPS ON THE SIDE OF YOU.

WHAT AN ARMADA. WE STAYED ON THOSE DOGGONE SHIPS, SEEMS LIKE ABOUT 52 DAYS BECAUSE WE COULDN'T GO----- THEY MOVED THIS ARMADA, INSTEAD OF GOING TO GUAM, WE TURNED AND WENT INTO THE MARSHALL ISLANDS. THEY MOVED THIS WHOLE ARMADA IN SO IT WOULD BE SAFE FROM U-BOAT ATTACK BACK IN THE ISLANDS THERE. WE STAYED THERE FOR 3 OR 4 WEEKS. ON A TROOPSHIP, YOU

KNOW, NO AIR CONDIDTIONING, NO NOTHING, JUST BUNKS 7 FEET HIGH AND ABOUT THAT MUCH BETWEEN EACH BUNK, 7 TIERS UP. OF COURSE, I'M A LITTLE OLD SKINNY GUY. IT DIDN'T BOTHER ME BUT A LOT OF GUYS HAD A HECK OF A TIME SLEEPING IN THERE, GETTING IN THE BUNKS REALLY.

STEVE

IT MUST HAVE BEEN TOUGH TRYING TO GET INTO THE BUNKS WITHOUT DISTURBING EVERYBODY.

KENNETH

YOU KNOW, YOU ALL WENT TO BED AT THE SAME TIME. I DON'T REMEMBER PAYING ANY ATTENTION TO THAT. I SLEPT AND THAT WAS IT

STEVE

DIDN'T REALLY BOTHER YOU?

KENNETH

THE HEAT JUST DIDN'T BOTHER YOU BECAUSE YOU DIDN'T KNOW YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO BE COOL. I REMEMBER ONE TIME IN THAT I WAS HOPING WHEN WE WENT TO GUADALCANAL, WHEN WE WERE ON THE TROOPSHIP THAT TIME. WHEN WE WENT FROM NEW ZEALAND TO GUADALCANAL, WE WERE ON THE TROOPSHIP AND THEY HAD AIR RAIDS THEN. EVERY NOW AND THEN AN AIR RAID WOULD COME IN AND THEY WOULD CLOSE ALL THE HATCHES AND SO ON. I NEVER WANTED TO GET CAUGHT IN THE CAFETERIA. YOU NEVER SAT DOWN ON A TROOPSHIP. YOU ALL STOOD UP TO EAT. YOU JUST WALK IN AND STOOD UP AND ATE AND GOT OUT AS FAST AS YOU COULD. ONE DAY, THEY HAD AN AIR RAID ALERT . THERE I WAS IN THAT CAFETERIA FULL OF MEN. NOT AIR CONDITIONING, NO FANS. YOU TALK ABOUT HOT. YOU CAN'T IMAGINE. AS I STOOD THERE, I'M THINKING, IT SCARED THE HECK OUT OF ME BECAUSE I DIDN'T WANT TO BE---- I WONDERED HOW WE WERE GOING TO BREATHE. I THOUGHT, IF I SAT DOWN ON THE FLOOR, I WOULD BE BELOW ALL THESE GUYS BREATHING UP HERE. THIS ALL DIDN'T LAST VERY LONG BUT I DID SIT DOWN. KNOWING NOW WHAT I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN THEN, CARBON DIOXIDE IS HEAVY AND IT GOES DOWN TO THE BOTTOM. I DID THE WRONG THING BY SITTING ON THE FLOOR. IF I HAD SAT THERE VERY LONG, I DON'T KNOW. IT DIDN'T HAPPEN ANYWAY.

WE WERE ON THIS DOGGONE HOT SHIP FOR 53 DAYS WAITING TO GO IN. ONE OF MY GOOD FRIENDS WHO'S NAME WAS SHELLHOUSE AND ANOTHER BOY, CLYDE STAIN AND THEY WERE BOTH FROM TEXAS. I DIDN'T KNOW THEM WHEN WE JOINED TOGETHER. WE MET IN SAN DIEGO. WE WENT FROM CORPUS CHRISTI TO NORTH CAROLINA AT THE SAME TIME. THIS SHELLHOUSE WAS MARRIED. CLYDE WASN'T MARRIED. HE WAS LIKE I WAS. HE WAS OLDER THAT I WAS. HE WAS SINGLE. SHELLHOUSE WAS MARRIED. THINGS BOTHERED HIM A LOT MORE THAN IT DID OLD CLYDE AND I. THAT DARNED SHELLHOUSE, WHILE

WE WERE ON THAT SHIP. I GUESS HE WAS FRIGHTENED OR SOMETHING BUT, NEARLY EVERY DAY HE WOULD SAY, "ROOT, YOU'RE GOING TO GET IT. WELL, WHEN WE HIT THAT LAND, YOU'RE GOING TO GET IT." WHY HE DID THAT, I NEVER KNEW. I WASN'T GOING TO CHALLENGE IT. IT WASN'T THAT BAD. HE JUST SAID THAT ABOUT EVERY OTHER DAY. WHEN HE WOULD SEE ME, HE WOULD SAY, "ROOT, BOY, YOU'RE GOING TO GET IT."

WHEN WE FINALLY WENT TO GUAM, WE HAD TO ——— IT SEEMS LIKE THE SHIPS WERE ABOUT SIX MILES OFF THE COAST OF GUAM WHEN WE GOT OFF THE SHIP. THEY GOT US UP AT 2 O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING AND GAVE US FRESH EGGS. FIRST TIME WE HAD FRESH EGGS IN 20 OR 25 MONTHS. WE KNEW THIS WAS IT. WE GOT OFF THOSE SHIPS AND WENT DOWN OUR NETS IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT AND JUMPED IN THOSE HIGGINS BOATS. THEY HAD TO GO ABOUT 4 OR 5 MILES IN THE HIGGINS BOAT AND THEN OUT OF THOSE. OUR LANDINGS TOOK PLACE ON THE COAST WHERE THERE ARE CORAL REEFS. IT WAS LIGHTLY DEFENDED THERE COMPARED TO WHAT IT WAS AROUND THE OTHER PLACES WHERE WE COULD HAVE LANDED EASY. WE HAD TO GET OUT OF THOSE THINGS INTO AN AMPHIBIAN TRACTOR AND THEN TO, GO OVER THOSE REEFS AND GO INTO THE BEACH, WHICH IS PROBABLY A MILE. WITH ALL THE SHELLS GOING OVER YOU, OUR WARSHIPS SHELLING THE ISLAND AND PLANES BOMBING THE ISLAND, THE JAPANESE SHOOTING BACK, IMAGINE IN THOSE SLOW DOGGONE THINGS GOING TO THE BEACH. I'LL TELL YOU, IT WAS SOMETHING.

YOU HAVE TO THINK ABOUT ALL YOUR THINGS, YOUR STEEL HELMET, YOUR CARBINE, FIRST AID SACK AND YOUR PACK ON YOUR BACK WITH EVERYTHING, YOUR BLANKET AND EVERYTHING ELSE YOU HAD WITH YOU ON YOUR BACK AND YOU HAD TO JUMP. AN AMPHIB TRACTOR WAS PROBABLY AS HIGH AS THIS CEILING RIGHT HERE. YOU COULDN'T WALK OFF OF THEM, YOU JUMPED OFF THEM. YOU HAD TO JUMP OFF WHEN THE GUY TOLD US. WHEN YOU GO ON THE BEACH BOYS, YOU JUMP. YOU BETTER GET AWAY FROM THIS TRACTOR BECAUSE IT IS LIKE A CATAPILLER WHEN YOU PRESS ONE SIDE OF IT, IT JUST SWUNG AROUND LIKE THAT. HE SAID, "YOU BETTER GET AWAY BECAUSE I WILL RUN OVER YOU."

WHEN I HIT THE GROUND, I FELL DOWN. I GOT UP OFF THAT SAND AND RAN AS HARD AS I COULD BEFORE I FELL DOWN AGAIN. TO GET MY BALANCE AND EVERYTHING. WE ALL SCRAMBLED TO GET AWAY FROM THAT TRACTOR BECAUSE THAT BOY WANTED TO GET OFF THE BEACH TOO.

WITH ALL THE THINGS AROUND YOU, YOU JUST WENT FROM HOLE TO HOLE. OUR PEOPLE WERE CRAWLING UP THE BEACH. I JUMPED INTO A SHELL HOLE. YOU KNOW WHO WAS IN THAT SHELL HOLE WITH MOST OF HIS FACE BLOWN AWAY? IT WAS SHELLHOUSE. THE GUY THAT WAS ??????? CON ME ALL THE TIME. THAT'S THE HONEST TO GOD TRUTH. ALL OF A SUDDEN HERE I AM WITH SHELLHOUSE AND HIS FACE WAS ----- HE WAS GOOD LOOKING YOUNG MAN. I JUST CAN'T REMEMBER ALL THE THINGS, BUT HE WAS JUST LAYING BACK WITH ALL THIS STUFF ON HIS CHIN. I COULDN'T BELIEVE IT. I GAVE HIM A SHOT OF MORPHINE RIGHT QUICK THERE, PUT A BATTLE DRESSING ON HIM. HE COULDN'T TALK OF COURSE. HE WAS JUST WATCHING ME WITH HIS EYES. I LOOKED UP AND WE WERE MOVING OUT. I COULDN'T STAY

THERE. I REMEMBER SAYING TO HIM. "SHELLHOUSE, I GOTTA GO." I TOLD HIM GOODBYE. I GOT OUT OF THE SHELL HOLE AND RAN TO THE NEXT ONE. THAT'S THE WAY I LEFT HIM. WHY HE WOULD DO THAT, I NEVER IN MY LIFE UNDERSTOOD IT. EVERYDAY, "ROOT, YOU'RE GOING TO GET IT." BELIEVE ME, THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED.

FROM THEN ON, WE JUST MOVED ACROSS GUAM. FUNNY THINGS HAPPENED THERE TOO. THE JAPANESE BROKE THROUGH OUR LINES BEFORE WE GOT OVER THE MOUNTAIN TOPS. IT WAS KIND OF LIKE IWO JIMA THERE. WE GOTTA GO OVER THE MOUNTAINS. THE FIGHTING, IT WAS REALLY SOMETHING. AT NIGHT, THEY WOULD SHOOT SHELLS OVER YOU TO SEE WHAT WAS GOING ON. AGAIN, THREE GUYS WOULD SLEEP IN A FOXHOLE. WHEN THE JAPANESE BROKE THROUGH, IT CAME RIGHT DOWN TO A VALLEY. THE VALLEY WAS PROBABLY A HALF MILE WIDE I SUPPOSE. THAT'S HOW THEY CAME OVER THE MOUNTAINS. WE WERE RIGHT JUST ON THE SIDE OF THE MOUNTAIN.

THEY BROKE THROUGH WITH ALL THIS PHOSPHORUS AND THEN DAYLIGHT COMING ON TOO. THE MARINES WERE ALL UP HERE ON THIS HIGH GROUND. THEY JUST PICKED THOSE JAPANESE OFF. IT WAS THE DARNDDEST THING YOU HAVE EVER SEEN. EVEN COOKS, YOU COULD LOOK BACK, EVEN COOKS COMING UP TO SHOOT A JAP. ISN'T THAT SOMETHING? I'M GLAD THAT DIDN'T HAPPEN TO ME. MY OTHER BEST FRIEND, NAME OF HANSON. HE ALWAYS SLEPT IN THE SAME FOXHOLE WITH ME. HE SAID, "I'M GOING DOWN AND KILL ME A JAP." I SAID, "HANSON, YOU BETTER NOT GO OVER THERE." AND HE WAS KILLED VERY SHORTLY THEREAFTER. HE COULD HAVE BEEN KILLED BY A MARINE SHOOTING FROM THE OTHER RIM. WE NEVER KNEW. ANYWAY, THAT WAS ANOTHER GOOD FRIEND OF MINE.

AFTER THAT, IT BROKE OVER THE MOUNTAIN. I SUPPOSE IT WAS THE SAME WAY ON IWO JIMA. ONCE THEY GOT UP ON TOP, THEN WE JUST KIND OF WENT OVER THE ISLAND, SECURED IT IN I DON'T KNOW HOW MANY DAYS. SLEEP ON THE GROUND IN HOLES AGAIN, ALL THE TIME. I JUST WONDER STEVE, HOW DID I SLEEP IN THOSE HOLES ALL THE TIME? IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE, REALLY. WHEN I THINK ABOUT IT TODAY.

STEVE

HOURS YOU SPENT ON THE GROUND.

KENNETH

I'LL BET YOU, IF I KNEW ALL THE TIME I'VE SLEPT—— I DON'T KNOW, 90 DAYS OR 120 DAYS? I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG WE WERE ON BOUGAINVILLE. THREE MONTHS OR WHAT? I THINK IT WAS ABOUT THREE MONTHS. ON GUAM, I SUPPOSE IT WAS A LEAST 2 WEEKS OR 3 WEEKS.

STEVE

LIVING LIKE A RAT.

KENNETH

LIVING LIKE A RAT, REALLY. WHEN WE LEFT THEN, AFTER GUAM WAS SECURED, WE GOT WORD THAT IWO JIMA WAS COMING UP. THIS TIME, ALL, MYSELF AND A FEW PEOPLE, CORPSMEN, WHO HAD GONE THROUGH CORPUS CHRISTI TO NORTH CAROLINA TO FORM THIS 3RD MARINES. SINCE WE WERE NAVAL PERSONNEL, WE HAD BEEN OVERSEAS 30 MONTHS AND SO, 24 MONTHS OVERSEAS FOR NAVY PERSONNEL, THEY SENT THEM BACK HOME. OUR TIME WAS UP SO THE CORPSMEN THEY WERE REPLACING, EITHER GOT KILLED OR WHATEVER FROM GUAM, THEY WERE BRINGING IN NEW CORPSMEN. WELL, THEY BROUGHT IN REPLACEMENTS FOR ME TOO. SO I GOT TO GO HOME.

WHEN I LEFT MY MARINES, I LEFT ALL MY MARINE BUDDIES, NEVER SAW THEM AGAIN. I HAVEN'T MET ANYBODY HERE YET THAT STARTED THE 3RD MARINE DIVISION. I JUST WENT BACK IN THE NAVY. ALL MY NAVY BUDDIES WERE GONE BECAUSE THERE WERE ONLY A FEW CORPSMEN TO BEGIN WITH. SOME WERE IN THE MARINE CORPS AND SOME WERE KILLED.

I HEAR A LOT OF VETERANS TALKING ABOUT WE'RE GOING TO MEET OUR COMPANY, WE ARE GOING TO GET TOGETHER AGAIN, THEY HAVE A GROUP TO GET TOGETHER. I NEVER HAD. THIS IS THE FIRST TIME. THE REASON WE CAME UP HERE, BECAUSE WE LIVE IN ARKANSAS WITH AN R.V. WE JUST HAPPENED TO BE AT EAGLE PASS WHEN MARTY SAW THIS IN THE PAPER. I SAID, "YOU KNOW, IT WOULD BE SOMETHING IF I COULD GET UP THERE AND MEET SOME GUYS THAT WERE IN THE 3RD MARINE DIVISION AND MAYBE IN MY OUTFIT, SOMEBODY THAT KNOW MY NAME. THAT IS WHY I AM USING THE ROOT NAME NOW. IF I USED THE HENRY NAME, SOMEBODY WHO MIGHT KNOW ME, MIGHT NOT KNOW ME AT ALL.

STEVE

DID YOU EVER GET BACK IN THE FRONT OR WERE YOU PULLED ENTIRELY OUT? I MEAN, AFTER YOU LEFT GUAM. IS THAT WHERE THEY REPLACED YOU? IS THAT THE LAST SERVICE YOU HAD WHEN THEY PULLED YOU OUT?

KENNETH

OH. NO, NO. I WENT BACK TO THE SERVICE, BACK TO SAN FRANCISCO AND THEN BACK TO----- I DIDN'T GET OUT OF THE SERVICE UNTIL DECEMBER. I GUESS I MUST HAVE LEFT GUAM PROBABLY IN JANUARY. IT MUST HAVE BEEN EITHER DECEMBER OR JANUARY THAT I LEFT GUAM. I FINISHED MY CAREER IN THE NAVY IN OPALOCA NAVAL AIR STATION IN MIAMI, FLORIDA.

STEVE

YOU DIDN'T GO BACK IN THE WORLD WAR II THEATER? WHEN YOU LEFT GUAM, YOU WENT BACK TO THE STATES AND STAYED THERE?

KENNETH

YES, IN THE STATES THE REST OF THE TIME. THE WAR WAS OVER IN AUGUST OF '45.

STEVE

I GUESS FROM MY BACKGROUND, WHAT WAS IT LIKE TRYING TO BE A CORPSMAN? I KNOW YOU WERE JUST DOING YOUR JOB.

KENNETH

JUST DOING MY JOB. SINCE I WAS SO YOUNG, WHERE WAS MY TRAINING? MY TRAINING WAS, AS SOON AS THEY TOOK ME IN THERE, HAD TO PUT A BANDAGE ON, NOT FAINT AT THE SIGHT OF BLOOD. MY JOB WAS TO TAKE CARE OF PEOPLE.

IT DIDN'T BOTHER ME ONE BIT TO TAKE CARE OF THEM. JUST LIKE WHEN SHELLHOUSE GOT KILLED. I FELT A LITTLE SAD, LIKE WHEN HANSTEAD WAS KILLED TOO. HE SAID, I WANT TO GO DOWN AND KILL A JAP. HE HAD NO BUSINESS BEING DOWN THERE. THE MARINES WERE TAKING CARE OF IT. HE DIDN'T HAVE TO TAKE HIS GUN AND GO DOWN THERE TO THE RIM.

IT WAS JUST THE SECOND NATURE. I BECAME A PRETTY GOOD CORPSMAN, REALLY. WHEN I WENT BACK TO OPALACA NAVAL AIR STATION, I WAS IN A CRASH CREW. I WAS STATIONED AT PERRY FIELD, WHICH WAS A SMALL FIELD WHERE THEY TRAINED FOR CARRIER PLANES. THEY USED LAND FIRST, THEN YOU WENT TO A CARRIER. THAT WAS MY JOB MOST OF THE TIME. TAKE AN AMBULANCE ALONG WITH A FIRE TRUCK AND SAT ON THE LINE WHERE THESE GUYS TRAINED, ALL DAY LONG IN THEIR PLANES.

ONE DAY, WE HAD AN EMERGENCY CALL. A GUY WAS COMING AND THE TOWER CALLED. WE WERE'NT EVEN ON THE LINE. DIDN'T HAVE A GROUP GOING AROUND. WE GOT IN OUR AMBULANCE RIGHT QUICK AND THE FIRE TRUCK WENT OUT TO STAND ON THE LINE. HERE CAME A TWO SEATER, I DON'T KNOW WHAT KIND OF A PLANE IT WAS, BUT IT WAS AN OPEN COCKPIT TYPE TRAINER THAT THE NAVY HAD. HE WAS IN TROUBLE. WE TURNED OUR RADIO ON IN THE AMBULANCE AND WE COULD LISTEN TO IT TALK TO THE TOWER.

WE SAW HIM AND HE CAME AROUND AND HE CRASHED. HE DIDN'T MAKE IT TO THE AIRFIELD. HE CRASHED RIGHT ACROSS FROM THE AIRFIELD RIGHT INTO A GUY'S COW. HE HAD A DAIRY OVER HERE. HE JUST CRASHED INTO HIS PLACE. WE TOOK OFF. THE AMBULANCE I HAD WAS A BIG OLD ARMY TRUCK AMBULANCE. YOU DIDN'T STOP TO GO THROUGH A GATE. YOU JUST WENT THROUGH THE FENCE IF YOU WERE IN A HURRY. WE WENT OVER THIS BIG OLD FENCE THEY HAD AROUND THE AIRFIELD. WE LAID IT DOWN AND WENT RIGHT OVER IT. WE WENT THROUGH A DITCH AND THEN RIGHT ACROSS THE FARMER'S YARD. HE HAD A BARBED WIRE FENCE AND THAT CUT OUR BRAKE LINE. WE HAD GONE THROUGH MANY FENCES. THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME THAT HAD HAPPENED.

WHEN WE GOT UP TO THE PLANE, I SAID, 'PARENTS, STOP, STOP, LET ME OFF.' I COULD SEE ONE

GUY WAS STILL IN THE PLANE. THE OTHER GUY WAS ON THE SIDE OF THE PLANE. IT WAS BEGINNING TO BURN. HE SAID, "I CAN'T STOP. WE DON'T HAVE ANY BRAKES." HE WHIRLED AROUND, CUT AROUND IN THE YARD SLOW ENOUGH WHERE I COULD FINALLY JUMP OUT. I JUMPED OUT AND RAN UP THERE. WHEN I GOT UP TO THE SIDE OF THE PLANE, THE PILOT WAS LAYING ON THE SIDE OF THE ROAD. YOU COULD PRETTY WELL SEE HE WASN'T TRYING TO GET OFF THE PLANE. THE GUY IN THE COCKPIT SAID, "HELP ME OUT OF HERE. THIS PLANE IS GOING TO BLOW UP." I SAID, "MAN, YU TELLING ME"

HE HAD A BROKEN ARM, A BROKEN LEG. HE PUSHED HIMSELF UP OUT OF THERE. HE WAS MUCH STRONGER HAN I AM. I COULDN'T LIFT HIM OUT ANYWAY. HE TRIED. HE CAME OUT AND FELL RIGHT ON TOP OF ME. DIDN'T TAKE ME LONG TO GET OUT FROM UNDERNEATH HIM. I PULLED THAT GUY AWAY FROM THERE. BY THAT TIME, THE AMBULANCE DRIVER WAS OUT AND HAD HIS STRETCHER OVER THER. HE GOT HIM ON THE STRECHER, AWAY FROM THE PLANE. BY THIS TIME THE FIRE TRUCK HAD GOTTEN THERE AND THE FIRE OUT SO THE PLANE DIDN'T BLOW UP.

THE PILOT WAS A COMMANDER. THEY HAD AN INVESTIGATION OF THIS THING AND A HEARING AND THEY BROUGHT ALL OF US IN, ALL OF US THAT HAD BEEN TO THE CRASH. WHEN I GOT UP TO TELL MY STORY, I SAID, "WHEN I WENT UP TO THE PLANE, I COULD SEE THAT THE PILOT WAS DEAD." THE G UY SAID, "WAIT JUST A MINUTE." THE CAPTAIN. THAT STOPPED ME A THE SECOND. WHAT DID I DO WRONG? HE LOOKED AT A DOCTOR SITTING AT THE TABLE AND HE SAID, "DOCTOR, CAN YOU TELL A MAN IS DEAD JUST BY LOOKING AT HIM?" THE DOCTOR SAID, "NO." I THOUGHT, WHAT AM I GOING TO SAY? ALL I COULD SAY WAS , "THE GUY IN THE COCKPIT SAID, GET ME OUT OF HERE, THE PLANE IS GOING TO BLOW UP. WHAT WOULD YOU DO, CHECK AND SEE IF HE IS DEAD? THAT'S THE WAY IT ALL CAME OUT. THEY WERE SUPPOSED TO GIVE ME A MEDAL FOR THAT BUT STEVE, THEY NEVER DID. THAT'S WHAT HAPPENED THERE, THAT ONE CRASH.

WE HAD A HECK OF A TIME GETTING THIS GUY TO THE HOSPITAL WITH NO BRAKES. WE JUST DID THE BEST WE COULD UNTIL WE GOT THERE. I NEVER KNOW WHETHER HE LIVED OR DIED OR ANYTHING.

I GUESS THERE WAS ANOTHER EXPERIENCE I WANTED TO TELL YOU. A T. B. F. IS A DIVE BOMBER. IT HAS A TORPEDO THAT COMES OUT UNDERNEATH IT. THERE IS A TURRET BACK HERE. THERE ARE TWO GUYS IN THE FRONT, A GUNNER AND THE PILOT. THERE ARE THREE GUYS IN THE PLANES. ONE DAY, THE TBF's WERE ABOUT A MILE FROM OUR STATION. WE WERE ON THE LINE AGAIN. WE WERE ABOUT A MILE FROM OUR STATION . WE WERE WATCHING AND THEY WOULD COME IN A DIVE AND THEN TAKE THEIR TORPEDO RUN. THIS ONE TBF CAME DOWN AND HE NEVER PULLED UP. HE HIT THE GROUND AND FROM WHERE I WAS STANDING I COULD SEE THE BALL OF FIRE. I KNEW THAT HE HAD CRASHED. WE WENT RIGHT ACROSS THE PASTURE AND WAS THERE IN PROBABLY TEN MINUTES ACROSS THOSE FIELDS. OF COURSE, THE PLANE WAS BURNING AND I COULD SEE THE PILOT WAS GONE. HE WAS BURNED UP. THEY DIDN'T STOP AND ASK HOW YOU KNEW HE WAS DEAD. I COULD SEE THAT I COULDN'T HELP HIM. I RAN BACK RIGHT QUICK WHERE THE SHIP HAD HIT. YOU COULD SEE WHERE THE TAIL GUNNER HAD JUST BEEN

RUBBED OFF AND WAS CRUSHED. I THOUGHT, WELL, THERE HAS TO BE A THIRD PERSON AROUND. THERE HAS TO BE SOMEONE AROUND. I LOOKED AND LOOKED AND COULDN'T SEE ANYONE. ABOUT THAT TIME, SOMEBODY SAID, "HEY DOC, LOOK OVER THERE." AND THERE WAS A BIG LUMP OUT IN THE FIELD. THAT TOP TURRET AND THE GUY IN IT HAD COME OFF OF THAT PLANE, AND TOOK OFF. THAT GUY WAS STILL STRAPPED IN THERE. STILL STRAPPED IN THAT THING AND SAID, "GET ME OUT OF HERE."

I DON'T HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT WAS WRONG WITH HIM BUT WE CUT HIM OUT AND PUT HIM ON A STRETCHER. I DON'T KNOW WHATEVER HAPPENED TO HIM. THERE HE WAS, ALL BY HIMSELF TRAPPED IN THAT DARNED BUBBLE IN THAT FIELD.

ANYWAY, THAT WAS ABOUT IT. I WAS DISCHARGED DECEMBER 19, 1945. THREE YEARS, NINE MONTHS AND 22 DAYS. THAT IS WHAT I WAS IN THE SERVICE. I WAS DISCHARGED FROM THERE. THAT WAS THE END OF MY SERVICE CAREER. I HAD THE GI BILL AND WENT TO SCHOOL AND HAVE A DEGREE IN SCIENCE AND A MASTERS DEGREE IN BIOLOGY AND A MASTERS DEGREE IN SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION.

I HAVE SPENT 30 YEARS IN EDUCATION, 2 YEARS IN THE CIA. I GOT OUT BECAUSE YOU GET TIRED OF TAKING CARE OF SICK PEOPLE AND SO ON. THAT WASN'T FOR ME. AND, THE CIA WAS ALWAYS SENDING ME OVERSEAS AND I HADN'T BEEN HOME. WORLD WAR II AND THIS WAS ALL PRETTY QUICK. I GOT OUT IN '45, MARRIED IN '46, WENT TO SCHOOL AND GRADUATED IN '51, CIA IN '52 AND '53, STARTED TEACHING IN '53.

STEVE

PRETTY BUSY TIME.

KENNETH

THAT'S JUST ABOUT THE STORY OF MY LIFE. I RETIRED THEN IN 1985.

END OF TAPE.

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