

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

***Nimitz Education and Research Center
Fredericksburg, Texas***

***Interview with Robert Buckner
US Marine Corps
Battle of Iwo Jima***

Interview With Robert Buckner

This is an interview with Robert Buckner, and today is the nineteenth of February, 2005. This interview is taking place in Fredericksburg, Texas and is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies, the Archives of the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Parks and Wildlife, for the preservation of historical information related to this site.

Mr. Rabalais: The way this is going to work, Robert, is I'll just get you to start by giving when you were born, where, where you went to school, a little bit about your family, and then your schooling primarily, and then how you ended up getting into the Marine Corps.

Mr. Buckner: How I went into the Marine Corps?

Mr. Rabalais: Where you born, when, and just all through your youth and where you went to school.

Mr. Buckner: Well, I was born January nineteenth, 1926, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. My family was on the family farm. I went to school in Marion, Iowa, which is right next to Cedar Rapids. That's where I got my high school education at that time. I enlisted in the Marine Corps when I was seventeen.

Mr. Rabalais: You were pretty young. That would have been in 'forty-four?

Mr. Buckner: 'Forty-three. In 1943 I was trying to get into aviation, but I found out my color vision wasn't acute enough. I had color deficiencies and I wasn't able to get in either the Navy or the Army air forces. But I was good enough for the Marine Corps.

Mr. Rabalais: So you went to the Marine Corps recruiting office and volunteered. You know, you and a lot of other high school guys were eager to be there. I guess there was something exciting about it, or did you get pushed into it?

Mr. Buckner: We knew we were going to be drafted. We had people drafted right out of high school. We didn't get to finish high school. I knew just two weeks after I was eighteen that I'd be drafted. And a good share of us enlisted when we were seventeen in order to pick the branch of service we wanted to go into.

Mr. Rabalais: Rather than put you in something.

Mr. Buckner: If you'd been drafted at that time, you'd have gone into the Army Infantry.

Mr. Rabalais: How'd you pick the Marines, then? You just . . .

Mr. Buckner: I can't say. I guess it was just the idea wanted to pick my branch of service, and I picked the Marine Corps. I was the only one of our group, well, there was only one other boy in my class that went into the Marine Corps. I can't really tell you.

Mr. Rabalais: How'd you feel now. You were a farm boy, so boot camp might not have been too bad for you, considering. You stood that pretty well?

Mr. Buckner: I had problems in boot camp with pneumonia. I was in Balboa Hospital for three weeks. I was in San Diego at the worst time of the year, we had almost no cold weather equipment in San Diego, which was unusual in December of 'forty-three. And I caught pneumonia. I got cat fever, what they call "cat fever," and then went into pneumonia and I was in Balboa Hospital for over three weeks. And I got put back quite a lot. I had about a month in one platoon and then I had to go into another platoon.

Mr. Rabalais: That's pretty discouraging.

Mr. Buckner: It was. The problem that I went into, at least my first platoon had some Iowans in it, and the second platoon was mostly from Alabama and Arkansas, and they're a different breed of cats. They hated blacks with a passion, and they disliked Yankees. (Laughs)

Mr. Rabalais: In boot, you went through things--were they cutting boot a little short by that time?

Mr. Buckner: Well, I had thirteen weeks. By the time I was in both outfits I had thirteen weeks of boot camp.

Mr. Rabalais: So you pretty much covered everything that they normally do for infantry types.

Mr. Buckner: Right. I was a grunt.

Mr. Rabalais: So right after boot, did they give you any extra training for any particular field?

Mr. Buckner: I didn't have any idea. I met a counselor and he said "How would you like to go into field music school." I said, "I can't play a trumpet." He said, "I don't care, we'll teach you how." And I said, "Really, I don't think that I'm suited for it." And low and behold, that's where I went. I went to field music school and I was in field music school for about three weeks. And then we shipped off to the 5th Marine Division. Of the entire class that was there, I think there was about fifteen or eighteen of us in that class, we were all shipped off to the 5th Marine Division.

Mr. Rabalais: Where were they at that time?

Mr. Buckner: It was San Diego. They had a field music school there, and they took the entire class and shipped it to the Fifth Marine Division.

Mr. Rabalais: Where were they based at? At Oahu, or Pearl, or . . . ?

Mr. Buckner: No, it was Pendleton.

Mr. Rabalais: Camp Pendleton. So they were putting together, they were restocking the 5th Marine, I guess, was what they were doing, in preparation of whatever their next assault would be.

Mr. Buckner: Each company was supposed to have two field musics to make up the SOP, and I went into Easy Company, and one other person in our group went into D Company. I never saw the rest of the class.

Mr. Rabalais: Did you know if the 5th was heading somewhere specific at that time?

Mr. Buckner: No. We knew the 5th was going somewhere. You see, the 5th was made up primarily paratroopers. They broke up about the time I went into field music class, they broke up three parachute battalions and two raider battalions and put them into the 5th Marine Division.

Mr. Rabalais: I talked to someone else that said that he had been in Paulson's Raiders, and then he ended up in the Marines.

Mr. Buckner: Yeah, they broke up the raiders and the paratroopers. So they shipped them back to the United States.

Mr. Rabalais: Was there animosity as a result of seeing these guys, Marines . . .

Mr. Buckner: No. There were so many of them, of course I was just like a boot, you know, youngster. There was only about, oh, I'd say in our company, probably twenty-five or thirty of us that were not paratroopers or raiders. And, they were a little bit older, because they'd been training for two years.

Mr. Rabalais: They were probably pretty proficient.

Mr. Buckner: And they were salties. They were tough. Those paratroopers were really a tough group.

Mr. Rabalais: Where was the first assignment? Did y'all go overseas pretty quickly?

Mr. Buckner: Well, no. We trained there. I was there for probably four months. In August we got word to load ships and the 26th Marines were to be the floating reserves for the Battle of Guam. We loaded, and were clear past Hawaii and they found out that we weren't needed at Guam, and so we turned and went back to Hawaii for further training.

Mr. Rabalais: Now you hadn't been very far from home before, had you, until you went into the Marines?

Mr. Buckner: No.

Mr. Rabalais: 'Cause a lot of this was maybe exciting, and different.

Mr. Buckner: First time I'd ever been away from home.

Mr. Rabalais: So the Pacific and all was pretty exotic, I guess.

Mr. Buckner: Right. We went back to Hawaii and then the 27th and 28th Marines followed us there, on the big island, Hawaii.

Mr. Rabalais: Did you have any liberty?

Mr. Buckner: Yeah, we did on the island, and then I think once or twice we got to take liberty for a three-day pass in Pearl Harbor, or Honolulu.

Mr. Rabalais: That must have been pretty exciting.

Mr. Buckner: Yes, it was. I was able to meet some friends over there that were in the Navy. But there wasn't much liberty on Hawaii there, except that Hawaii was mainly Japanese and Hawaiian people, very few Caucasians there.

Mr. Rabalais: Let me ask you a couple little minor things about life. I know during boot, you probably didn't pay that much attention to it, but what was the food situation. Was it quite a bit of a change from what you'd been eating, was it not too good? I've heard all kinds of horror stories.

Mr. Buckner: Well, I approved most food.

Mr. Rabalais: It wasn't all that bad?

Mr. Buckner: No. The food was pretty good. In fact, I had to have thirty days of mess duty because of swimming. My swimming proficiency wasn't up to Marine standards, and so I had to take an extra thirty days after boot camp for swimming instruction, and I had to work at the mess hall. It was hard work there. In fact, it was probably the hardest work as I ever had to do, getting up early in the morning and then cleaning. But I thought the food was pretty good. Some people complained about it, but they'd get complaints no matter what it was.

Mr. Rabalais: What about equipment? Y'all trained with the M1 by that time, 'forty-four the M1 was pretty much . . .

Mr. Buckner: We were issued an M1 rifle and that was our baby, and you had to qualify on it. And we went to Camp Matthews for three weeks for rifle training.

Mr. Rabalais: Had you hunted much at home before that, so you were pretty familiar with rifles . . .

Mr. Buckner: I was.

Mr. Rabalais: . . . and shotguns, probably.

Mr. Buckner: The biggest thing with the rifle that bothered me was the person next to you. The loud report bothered me. I was really sensitive. That's something that I had a heck of time—if I'd had ear plugs like they have now.

Mr. Rabalais: Yeah, in those days they didn't.

Mr. Buckner: They didn't have ear plugs.

Mr. Rabalais: Even in the nineteen-sixties, when I was in the service, same situation. I was in the airborne, and every time somebody fired next to me, first, I was left-handed. And that put me even close to a guy who was right-handed.

Mr. Buckner: I could have fired, I know, a lot better if I would have had ear plugs or ear pieces that would have blocked the noise.

Mr. Rabalais: And the weather. The day that we did our firing was sleeting. That didn't help matters any. What about your officers? Until you got, after training, I mean, training, you got certain kinds of DIs that are tough sons of bitches, and so forth. You move on from them. Your regular NCOs and officers when you got to the 5th Marines, to the 20—uh,

Mr. Buckner: 26th.

Mr. Rabalais: What kind of people were they. Were they okay?

Mr. Buckner: We had one that was kind of a GI that nobody liked, even fellow officers.

Mr. Rabalais: NCO?

Mr. Buckner: No, he was an officer. Oddly enough, he later got the Congressional Medal of Honor in Korea. But all the rest of our officers were real, they were all college graduates, they were all paratroopers, as were all of our NCOs, were all paratroopers.

Mr. Rabalais: So there's a little bit different case that you had on your . . .

Mr. Buckner: Well, well-trained. In fact the 5th Marine Division, at the time we went into combat, I look back on it now, it was probably the best trained military division in the entire

forces, primarily because those men were trained for a year and a half, two years training before going into combat.

Mr. Rabalais: Before their unit was even formed. And I can see that now. I understand that now. Because some of the earlier phase, 'forty-two and 'forty-three units, some of the officers they had in there lacked a lot. They lacked leadership in some cases, and training. And that just comes with experience, what the paratroop officers had.

Living conditions, typical barracks, clothing.

Mr. Buckner: We were lucky. The 26th Marines were the first ones, we had barracks. The 27th and 28th had tents. They had the tent camps. But the 26th Marines had barracks. They were squad rooms, you know, like that, three men to a rack, but we had plenty of room and it was a very comfortable, you had your own bunk.

Mr. Rabalais: Did you make buddies, I mean real close buddies, at that time?

Mr. Buckner: Very few. I made closer buddies when we left and went over to Hawaii.

Mr. Rabalais: Okay, let's say from Hawaii on.

Mr. Buckner: I had very few close friends there. They had their own friends. They were there, I was the newcomer. I became close friends with a corpsman, a Navy corpsman, and one or two other people, but then I learned to, after, I said I'd never get real close to anybody.

Mr. Rabalais: Where did y'all go to from—you trained some more in Hawaii? Did you do any beach training?

Mr. Buckner: Right. We did a lot of beach training.

Mr. Rabalais: Did you do any practice, Amtrak practice?

Mr. Buckner: We used those once. The 28th Marines used them a lot, because they didn't know it at the time, but they were going to be the assault on Iwo. But we went in on Higgins boats all the time. I don't know how many practice landings we made with Higgins boats.

Mr. Rabalais: Y'all got pretty proficient with that.

Mr. Buckner: Well, getting down from a ship, getting down into a Higgins boat, it takes some real practice.

Mr. Rabalais: Did you use cargo nets?

Mr. Buckner: Cargo nets, and that thing bouncing up and down.

Mr. Rabalais: Timing, timing when jumping, when to jump.

Mr. Buckner: A few people got hurt. Even on dry land, we would go up and down those nets until our hands were so sore, climbing up and down those nets. That became a real art, to climb up and down those nets if you're loaded with gear, about fifty, sixty pounds of gear on you.

Mr. Rabalais: In describing the uniform, how much did y'all wore? The Marines generally have fabric on their helmets and, well, I don't know if they have netting or not, but it was camouflage.

Mr. Buckner: It was camouflage, all the Marines. the Army didn't do so. I saw on the History Channel the other day, the reason the Army didn't was because the Germans did. They couldn't tell the difference.

Mr. Rabalais: I didn't realize that.

Mr. Buckner: Yeah, it was on the History Channel just last week.

Mr. Rabalais: Okay, so from, y'all have trained now, you're in Hawaii, what was next assignment then that y'all shipped out to?

Mr. Buckner: That was Iwo Jima.

Mr. Rabalais: Oh, directly to Iwo.

Mr. Buckner: Yeah, we took a practice landing at Maui there, and then we had three days' R&R. We stayed in Pearl Harbor for about four days, and we got a couple days of R&R there, and then we shipped out to Iwo Jima.

Mr. Rabalais: You were on an attack transport, I guess, an ATA I think they call them.

Mr. Buckner: ATA-121, *USS Hocking*.

Mr. Rabalais: ATA-121.

Mr. Buckner: Called *USS Hocking*. I looked it up down at the Naval base, it's still listed, but of course it's been scrapped. It was a brand new ship, a brand new ship when we got it. It was one of those specials, you know. Some of them cracked up.

Mr. Rabalais: My dad built ships at Delta Shipyards. One of 'em he built I teased him about. He had a

photograph of it being launched, the *Samuel Chase*. I looked it up on the Internet, and the *Samuel Chase*, the following January, broke up in the mid-Atlantic, it broke in two and sunk.

Mr. Buckner: (something intelligible here)

Mr. Rabalais: The _____ with cold water would become brittle, and the ship just all of a sudden would break in two. So they finally found a fix for that.

But anyway, y'all were heading directly to Iwo. Did y'all stop at Ulithi or Marshall?

Mr. Buckner: No. We went through the Marshalls. We didn't stop. We stopped at Saipan, we couldn't leave ship. My cousin was a B-29 pilot but was on a mission.

Mr. Rabalais: Was there any killing, threat of kamikazes, at Saipan at that time.

Mr. Buckner: I don't think so. There could have been, I guess.

Mr. Rabalais: There was no evidence of it from what you saw.

Mr. Buckner: Because we'd pretty well isolated Iwo Jima.

Mr. Rabalais: So we're heading for Iwo now. There was a pre-bombardment, there was some _____ down by _____ on the eighteenth, maybe seventeenth or eighteenth, and when did y'all arrive on the nineteenth, or after?

Mr. Buckner: We arrived the day that we landed.

Mr. Rabalais: On the nineteenth?

Mr. Buckner: We arrived there and sometime in the night, we arrived there and anchored. The Second Battalion was floating with the 26th Marines, were a floating reserve, and the Second Battalion with the 26th Marines was the floating battalion. So we went in the water oh, about ten o'clock in the morning, and we went around and around in a circle about four hours, and then we went ashore about two o'clock in the afternoon.

Mr. Rabalais: Were those dockings where y'all got . . .

Mr. Buckner: Oh, we all got sicker than a dog. The diesel fumes, we got 'em. To this day, I can't stand diesel fumes. They make me sick today.

Mr. Rabalais: By the time y'all landed, y'all had been had been around in that boat a pretty long time, and you were ready to get on shore somewhere.

Mr. Buckner: I had the dry heaves so bad that anything was better than—we always said they drove you around enough to make you, that's the last place you wanted to be, was staying aboard that boat.

Mr. Rabalais: We're looking at the map now, a blow map of Iwo, and I believe this is the area that you landed at, this is Surabachi right here.

Mr. Buckner: It's right there.

Mr. Rabalais: And y'all landed right here?

Mr. Buckner: Oh yeah.

Mr. Rabalais: Now this was a shallow black sand beach, I guess?

Mr. Buckner: All the way through here. We were fortunate enough that I didn't even get my feet wet. Because it was deep right out there, and the Higgins boat ramp landed on shore.

Mr. Rabalais: You went right up on the sand.

Mr. Buckner: Right up on the sand.

Mr. Rabalais: And so you were able to drop the ramp literally on the sand.

Mr. Buckner: On the sand. I never got wet.

Mr. Rabalais: I'll be darned.

Mr. Buckner: None of us got our feet wet there because the water wa deep enough, and then all of a sudden there was sand.

Mr. Rabalais: Now, the troops had been going ashore already and had been getting hard along in here. Did y'all take any casualties coming off your particular boat?

Mr. Buckner: No. Our battalion when it landed, we never had a casualty. The 28th Marines had gone across earlie and had many casualties.

Mr. Rabalais: Oh, they'd already cut across.

Mr. Buckner: They'd cut across, most of the way across there, and the bombardment, the whole thing, right here in this area's where the beach really took a beating.

Mr. Rabalais: You're pointing at Airfield Number One, the beach front in front of Airfield Number One.

Mr. Buckner: Our 27th Marines and the Fourth Division landed here. The 27th landed here, and the Fourth Division landed in here. They got hit hard on the beach. In fact, after I'd been there and went back, I had to go back to the beach area, they were blowing up landing craft in order to get more of them in.

Mr. Rabalais: Now Surabachi, they hadn't had the flag ceremony yet or anything like that.

Mr. Buckner: Oh no, that was four days later.

Mr. Rabalais: When y'all landed, which direction did y'all go, towards Surabachi?

Mr. Buckner: No.

Mr. Rabalais: Or towards the airfield.

Mr. Buckner: We went this way, the 26th Marines went this way.

Mr. Rabalais: Okay. Straight across the narrow neck. In front of Surabachi. And then northward along that east side.

Mr. Buckner: We were reserved until right here. And at this point right here we were committed.

Mr. Rabalais: Which is the cross strip of Airfield Number One.

Mr. Buckner: Yeah. And we were committed to the line right here the third day.

Mr. Rabalais: The line was somewhere in this area right here, at that point in time.

Mr. Buckner: Right here was hills, a lot of this was hills.

Mr. Rabalais: So they, so the line of resistance was somewhere near, so the Japanese . . .

Mr. Buckner: It was back here a little further.

Mr. Rabalais: The Japs were resisting resisting pretty strongly in this area, in front of Airfield One?

Mr. Buckner: Right. This is where we took casualties. I took to the captain the attack plans which P and E were to go broadside and attack. We attacked that rainy day, it was a rainy day just about like today. We didn't go anywhere, we lost just about half the company.

Mr. Rabalais: I didn't realize this. It was sort of chilly at night, wasn't it? Sort of cold?

Mr. Buckner: It was cool, when they had rain. Somebody said there was a lot of rain. I don't know where they got that information, because we only had that miserable rain that one day, the third day we attacked. It was a drizzly day, just like today. It was a misty rain and you got wet.

Mr. Rabalais: Was there some fog? We talked about the fog as we drove out this morning to the site.

Mr. Buckner: Something very similar. Somewhat similar to that

Mr. Rabalais: That was the third day.

Mr. Buckner: Um-hum. And after that I think the sun came out some off and on.

Mr. Rabalais: Okay. So there was some resistance in front of Airfield Number One as the Japanese were being pushed back towards the wider part of the island, or the northeast end of the island. Was it slow going in there?

Mr. Buckner: All the way here and up here. The Fourth Division really got hit in this area right here, and that's when they landed the Third Division.

Mr. Rabalais: They had been in support?

Mr. Buckner: They had been in ships. They landed two regiments of the Third Division and they quickly got hit real hard right in this area, right in here.

Mr. Rabalais: Were there emplacements in these hills, gun emplacements?

Mr. Buckner: These were huge cliffs, seventy-five to a hundred feet high in this area, and we had hills in here. they had gun emplacements and it was all honeycombed with caves.

Mr. Rabalais: So you really couldn't see them very very well, they were honeycombed in the caves, they'd pop up and drop a shell. Did they have any heavy ordinance, or that was coming from further back.

Mr. Buckner: Further back, yeah.

Mr. Rabalais: Further back in here.

Mr. Buckner: Particularly the reverse side of hills. They had them so you couldn't see them.

Mr. Rabalais: What about mortar fire?

Mr. Buckner: The mortar fire was terrific. The Japanese were very accurate with mortar fire.

Mr. Rabalais: Small mortars, and they used them a lot.

Mr. Buckner: They were good with mortars. The artillery toward the end, it was all mortars. When we were in here, we got a lot of artillery from up in here, see.

Mr. Rabalais: But they eventually neutralized that.

Mr. Buckner: Yeah. And the mortar fire was unbelievable. And they were accurate with it. You never knew when it was coming.

Mr. Rabalais: It didn't whistle quite as much like you see in the movies, you know, it was more quiet.

Mr. Buckner: The artillery was "SSSSH HH bang" you know, and one right after another. I think it was more scary in an artillery barrage.

Mr. Rabalais: So this took a little while to move forward along the east side of the island, which is toward Airfield Number Two. Did you see a fair number of dead Japanese bodies as you went along that ridge?

Mr. Buckner: No. Very few. In fact, a lot of people don't understand this, I said I never saw a Japanese up close. All the time. I saw them a long ways off, because the Japanese in our area, they stayed put. Now if you were in here, they'd come out and attack, but they did exactly as Kuribayashi wanted them to do, stay in there and hide in spider holes, pop up behind us. That's the biggest thing I had to worry as a runner, that I had somebody back there popping up, and they liked to get a single person.

Mr. Rabalais: Because if you could get him, then there's nobody to get back at them.

Mr. Buckner: No body to see him.

Mr. Rabalais: Snipers, were a problem?

Mr. Buckner: Snipers were a real problem. For us. I had the job of runner, and hauling things, and stretchers, and things of this nature.

Mr. Rabalais: Because there was only one or two or three of you, and snipers could pick you off.

Mr. Buckner: Right.

Mr. Rabalais: Did you see any of your friends get hit? Any of your buddies get hit specifically?

Mr. Buckner: Yes. I was with Major Rae, once we were going to locate another CP, and the sniper a Nambu opened up and got the radio man, got the man right in front of me. Missed me.

Mr. Rabalais: They were killed?

Mr. Buckner: One of 'em was killed, the other one was, the radio man, was wounded.

Mr. Rabalais: Was the major hit?

Mr. Buckner: No. We hauled the person out.

Mr. Rabalais: That left a pretty big impression on you?

Mr. Buckner: Yeah, because that was about our fourth or fifth day, and that was the first, the very closest, I 'd had with rifle. We'd had all kinds of artillery barrages, where you had to hit the ground and pray in the fox hole, but this was the first time with rifles.

Mr. Rabalais: A Nambu would mean a machine gun?

Mr. Buckner: Yeah, a Nambu was a light machine gun that they had, that fired eight or ten rounds in a burp.

Mr. Rabalais: It was fast firing.

Mr. Buckner: Fast firing is not very accurate, fortunately.

Mr. Rabalais: You generally just had the Garands M1, y'all had BAR people.

Mr. Buckner: Our company had BAR, each squad had a BAR man. And an assistant BAR man. They were good weapons.

Mr. Rabalais: Not a fun job to have, 'cause it's so heavy.

Mr. Buckner: They were heavy. They were actually World War I equipment, but they were very reliable.

Mr. Rabalais: So we're moving forward past Airfield Number Two, the middle airfield, which is the one eventually that became the most active one used by the Americans. From what I understand from other people. So y'all pushed on up the east side, and that was slow going. Did y'all run into any kind of like severe cliffs or anything that stopped y'all?

Mr. Buckner: We were stopped here, right in this area, and our F Company made a big advance, and advanced all the way up here. They held, F Company of the Second Battalion, in reserve

all the time. And we were completely decimated and then all of a sudden they ordered the F Company and they made an attack, and made six hundred yards, which was a huge gain.

Mr. Rabalais: For Iwo, that was a big gain.

Mr. Buckner: Right, and and went off almost to Airfield Number Three here. Then we stayed at Airfield Number Three for awhile, then we broke across here and it wasn't too long after we got into here we were relieved. We went clear down to almost Kitano Point.

Mr. Rabalais: Now, what kind of terrain was in here?

Mr. Buckner: Oh, that was rugged!

Mr. Rabalais: Rugged cliffs, rocky?

Mr. Buckner: Rocky cliffs, arroyos, and things of this nature down there.

Mr. Rabalais: That's dangerous country then, in terms of . . .

Mr. Buckner: For snipers. We'd taken all of the heavy equipment out. The Japanese were, I think they were starving to death, and water was a big problem for them. They had no water.

Mr. Rabalais: Did y'all have any people like beheaded, or knifed, or something, at night.

Mr. Buckner: No.

Mr. Rabalais: Was night a fearful time for you?

Mr. Buckner: No. Well, it was and it wasn't. You didn't go out at night. There's no light. Well, you had light. The ship to shore had, uh, . . .

Mr. Rabalais: Spotlights?

Mr. Buckner: No, they had, uh, . . .

Mr. Rabalais: Star shells.

Mr. Buckner: They had star shells. And, you'd go down and of course it'd get eerie, at night, and then those star shells would come up and you could see, you could see a long ways.

Mr. Rabalais: It's interesting. I interviewed a young Navy man who was on the battleship *Arkansas*, and he manned a five-inch gun, an old fashioned manually loaded five-inch gun, he

said "All I did all night was fire star shells in a certain place on the island they told me to, and I had no idea what I was shooting at, because I was just firing star shells."

Mr. Buckner: Yes, that's exactly what they were doing.

Mr. Rabalais: Did it quiet down quite a bit at night?

Mr. Buckner: Really quieted down. We didn't move at night. In fact, up until we were up in this area here, nothing was ever done at night. You bet that there, in fact, if you pulled out of your fox hole to, for toilet or anything like that, you could have been shot there, because you were told never to move at night.

Mr. Rabalais: So the Japanese didn't just arbitrarily just shoot around much at night.

Mr. Buckner: They harassed you some.

Mr. Rabalais: They were waiting for a target, probably.

Mr. Buckner: And we had one unusual thing right in here. The night was just as quiet as could be.

Mr. Rabalais: Opposite the runway on Number Two.

Mr. Buckner: Yeah. It was just as quiet as could be there, and somebody kept yelling "Corpsman, corpsman," and it was a Jap . . .

Mr. Rabalais: And you heard that?

Mr. Buckner: And it was a Jap, that was a trick that they had to try to get you out.

Mr. Rabalais: Not just in the movies, that really happened.

Mr. Buckner: Yeah, that really happened. And he just yelled "Corpsman, corpsman" and then at one time (chuckles) afterward, he said "Roosevelt is an SOB." He said it with a . . . (both laugh), and . . .

Mr. Rabalais: His English was good enough?

Mr. Buckner: His English was good enough, but you could tell by a lisp that they had. What was the funniest thing about it, the place was so quiet, and I know this had to be a hundred yards ahead of us, where I was, I was manning a machine gun at that time, and I don't know what I could have done with it, because I never had any machine gun training.

Mr. Rabalais: Oh, you didn't? (Laughs) A light machine gun?

Mr. Buckner: Yeah. Thirty caliber.

Mr. Rabalais: Thirty caliber light machine guns. I'll be darned. So nobody bit on that.

Mr. Buckner: Nobody bit. We were warned that was a stunt they pulled, and finally it came out, "Roosevelt is an SOB."

Mr. Rabalais: I understand on Guadalcanal they did that, and some Americans did bite on that and it cost them dearly. That was a nasty one. Okay, so you were young and full of vinegar at that time, and probably in pretty good shape physically, I would imagine, so did this take a toll on you? Was it . . .

Mr. Buckner: I was fortunate, I didn't get dysentery, like a lot of men got dysentery. Got the runs and went down to practically nothing. In fact I talked to one person, said he lost thirty pounds in that month on Iwo Jima. We went the first three days with only a D bar, that's all we had, was a D bar.

Mr. Rabalais: Wow.

Mr. Buckner: For the first three days, D bar and water. Which was enough to nourish you, I guess. And then we had K rations, and then toward the end we had C rations, canned C rations.

Mr. Rabalais: Now almost to Kitana Point, then y'all were pulled back and relieved?

Mr. Buckner: Yeah. We got up here and we didn't have many men left. We only had a few original men.

Mr. Rabalais: Y'all had taken that many casualties?

Mr. Buckner: Yeah. We only had about fifteen or, twenty men left. Easy Company ended with 0 officers and sixteen original men. I was one of the sixteen.

Mr. Rabalais: Out of the company?

Mr. Buckner: Out of the company. Easy Company. We had probably thirty including replacements.

Mr. Rabalais: So the casualties were just like dribbling along, just . . .

Mr. Buckner: Oh yeah.

Mr. Rabalais: . . . one or two or three here and there.

Mr. Buckner: On the first attack, we lost half our company in the first attack.

Mr. Rabalais: In those hills, off Number One there somewhere.

Mr. Buckner: We lost all of our officers . . .

Mr. Rabalais: Really!

Mr. Buckner: We lost all seven of our officers the first days we were ashore. D and F Companies lost all but one of their officers.

Mr. Rabalais: You think they would deliberately target your officers, or . . .

Mr. Buckner: Well, the officers had to lead, you know, and they went from one fox hole to another, and I still say the Japanese had a real good way of identifying our leaders, officers and senior noncoms, because they got them. They got all seven of our officers, the captain was the last one, the sixth day they got Captain Higgins, which was our company commander.

Mr. Rabalais: Killed him?

Mr. Buckner: No, we only lost one killed, but the rest of 'em were badly wounded. Three of 'em got hit, shattered arms. Captain Higgins, they shattered his arm, he wanted to stay in the Marine Corps and they couldn't save it.

Mr. Rabalais: The Japanese rifle, I think the 6.5, Ariska or Asaki, or whatever it's called . . .

Mr. Buckner: It's a 6.5 mm, I believe.

Mr. Rabalais: The wounds they made, were they worse or better?

Mr. Buckner: I think they were high velocity. I have two Japanese rifles that I was able to send back from Japan, one's the twenty-five caliber, a long one, the other one is the thirty-one caliber which is the standard.

Mr. Rabalais: Oh, that was the standard issue, the thirty-one caliber?

Mr. Buckner: A little bit bigger than our M1.

Mr. Rabalais: And the Nambu I think is probably seven point something millimeter. It sort of fit an M1 because some of the guys were telling me that they could actually fire it in the M1 but couldn't . . .

Mr. Buckner: I didn't know that.

Mr. Rabalais: They tried to do that, and the shell casing was fanned and you couldn't get it out. Y'all tried anything silly like that?

Mr. Buckner: No. There wasn't any purpose of it, as far as that goes, because one thing about it, I don't know if we were ever short of ammunition. Maybe some of 'em were, I don't know.

Mr. Rabalais: They were just messing around, the ones that told me about that, they wanted to see if it would work, and you could actually fire it, but then the casing would expand.

Mr. Buckner: As far as that goes, it was accurate. The twenty-five was very accurate, it was a long rifle. It was about three or four inches longer than our M1.

Mr. Rabalais: I've seen pictures of it standing next to Japanese, and it's just as tall as the Jap is.

Mr. Buckner: Yeah. It was very accurate and very high velocity. It was a high velocity. The bullet, I'm told actually, at that time I didn't know one bullet from another bullet as far as that goes, but it cracked a lot more.

Mr. Rabalais: You could hear a distinct crack.

Mr. Buckner: Cracking.

Mr. Rabalais: Their Nambu machine gun, did it have a different sound than ours? A different sound that you could identify? Because I understand a German MG forty-two, it sounded almost like a zipper, it was a fast firing, quite a bit different than our slower firing. Did y'all use fifties, were there any fifty calibers or anything that y'all had?

Mr. Buckner: We had thirty calibers, and we had water cools, and we dumped them right away. The water cools were too heavy and not maneuverable, and I don't think our thirty calibers, our water cools, ever fired a shot. The others did, of course. The light thirty calibers, the air cooled thirty calibers.

Mr. Rabalais: I saw some of those there today, and of course they had quite a few fifties in evidence, but they were mostly on tanks or on . . .

Mr. Buckner: Well, they had some fifties in the weapons platoon, the regimental weapons platoon had some fifties, but I never saw them.

Mr. Rabalais: Did y'all have mortars, a mortar squad or a mortar platoon, attached to your unit?

Mr. Buckner: Yeah, each company had a mortar platoon. We had a mortar platoon, in fact, I was attached to it but not as a mortar man, as a runner. But I was attached to this mortar

squad and they fired sixty-millimeters mortars, and then the eighty-one millimeter mortars were a battalion weapon.

Mr. Rabalais: Battalion weapon.

Mr. Buckner: Right. They were further behind.

Mr. Rabalais: So the sixties gave y'all close support, I guess. Were they used quite a bit?

Mr. Buckner: Yeah. We used our sixties a great deal. In fact, they stayed far enough back, while we had a lot of casualties up there, nothing like the assault squad or anything like that. In fact, about half of our survivors were machine gun or mortar people.

Mr. Rabalais: Hum. 'Cause usually the machine gunners were the ones that went down first. Okay, so then when you were pulled back, y'all were sent in reserve somewhere?

Mr. Buckner: No. When we pulled out for the last time, we were right in here, we pulled back, came back to the cemetery area and . . .

Mr. Rabalais: Where was that, the cemetery area, I have not heard that term used. Was it near the airfield somewhere?

Mr. Buckner: Yeah. It was by the airfield, I think it was right in here, if I remember right. Each division had their own cemetery.

Mr. Rabalais: Oh, so this is the U.S. cemetery. It was not an existing cemetery.

Mr. Buckner: No, no, it was the Fifth Division cemetery. In fact, I was saying today, the most haunting thing that I had was after I pulled off the line and went back to the cemetery.

Mr. Rabalais: Did they have crosses up yet?

Mr. Buckner: Yeah, they had crosses up there, and Lieutenant Barber asked me if I and another person who wanted to go back and pay our respects to close buddies.

Mr. Rabalais: People that y'all knew?

Mr. Buckner: And we went back, Eldon Culros and I went back. We went back to the cemetery and we found Corpsman Lee Bunt, his grave. And as we were leaving, a truck pulled up.

Mr. Rabalais: A corpsman had been killed?

Mr. Buckner: Yeah. Lee received the Silver Star.

Mr. Rabalais: You knew him pretty well?

Mr. Buckner: Very well. We went on liberty in Pearl Harbor when we were there, before we left for Iwo. And then when we were leaving the cemetery, a big truck pulled up with bodies, like we rode on today, only it was a flatbed, and they had bodies on that like cord wood. Four deep on there. And that about cracked me up. I thought, you know, how could people stand to do a job like that.

Mr. Rabalais: A distasteful job.

Mr. Buckner: Right. I knew somebody had to do it, but they treated those bodies just like you would cord wood.

Mr. Rabalais: I guess you had to get numbed after awhile.

Mr. Buckner: You have to. You have to be numb to . . .

Mr. Rabalais: You couldn't take it otherwise.

Mr. Buckner: I don't know how anybody could take it. I thought that was the worst thing I saw in the whole campaign.

Mr. Rabalais: So after y'all had been pulled back, were y'all held in reserve, y'all were not in contact . .

Mr. Buckner: Just for a day. Just for a loaded ship.

Mr. Rabalais: Oh, then y'all loaded back on ship? Back on Higgins boats, and back to the . . .

Mr. Buckner: No, we went aboard an LST. four hundred Japanese made a final suicide attack in the area where we vacated and boarded our ship.

Mr. Rabalais: You went aboard directly on an LST.

Mr. Buckner: An LST, and then we went from an LST to a transport. And that transport probably stayed there for a day, and then we took off for Hawaii in a convoy.

Mr. Rabalais: So y'all didn't go to the Okinawa invasion, then?

Mr. Buckner: We were scared to death. We had rumors, we had heard rumors that we might be replacements if the Battle of Okinawa would have been bloody right off the bat. But, see, Okinawa . . .

Mr. Rabalais: Was not contested at the beach.

Mr. Buckner: It was probably several days before it was serious, and so at that time we thought it wasn't gonna be that bad, so they shipped us back to Hawaii. But the rumor was around that they were gonna use us as replacements.

Mr. Rabalais: Y'all were not thrilled about that.

Mr. Buckner: I guess not. And we didn't think it was a fair situation. We'd done our part, you know.

Mr. Rabalais: Y'all had lost steadily, especially Easy Company. Were your battalion as a whole lost pretty heavily, or just Easy Company?

Mr. Buckner: No, no . Our battalion, I think the records show that we landed with nine hundred and ninety-eight men, and we had nine hundred and forty-something casualties.

Mr. Rabalais: Wow!

Mr. Buckner: That's our battalion. Not all killed of course.

Mr. Rabalais: No, I understand.

Mr. Buckner: But, in our First Battalion, our First Battalion, the 26th Marine, the records show that they had the most casualties of any battalion in the entire campaign. The Second Battalion lost the ost officers.

Mr. Rabalais: I did not realize that.

Mr. Buckner: And we were close to being second. Part of the 28th Marine unit had about the same as we did. In fact, all line companies of all divisions ha similar casualties.

Mr. Rabalais: Okay. So back in Hawaii now, you're relieved you're back there, I guess. Y'all given some extensive liberty at that point, to sort of unwind?

Mr. Buckner: Yeah. We got liberty once we got things straightened around there, we came back to the same area where we were before. We got a three-day pass, and then a lot of our wounded were coming back to us. About, oh, I'd say, twenty-five to thirty percent of the wounded came back, were able to be rehabilitated and come back. Then we lost, had twenty-five percent killed, and then another twenty-five percent were wounded too badly. A couple of my close friends were taken back to the United States and stayed in the hospital until they were discharged.

Mr. Rabalais: From there the war probably wound down and ended before y'all went anywhere else.

Mr. Buckner: We felt we were about two weeks away from being shipped out to attack Japan. When everybody was going to be involved. The atomic bomb changed that.

Mr. Rabalais: Oh, that would have been a bloody son of a bitch.

Mr. Buckner: Yeah. We landed in Sasibo, we landed exactly where we would have landed if the war continued.

END OF SIDE ONE OF TAPE A

SIDE TWO OF TAPE A BEGINS:

Mr. Buckner: We were—we had ammunition and everything when we landed in Japan.

Mr. Rabalais: Supposedly they had surrendered, but y'all went in thinking that they might not

RECORDING ON SIDE TWO OF TAPE A ENDS HERE

RECORDING OF SIDE ONE OF TAPE B BEGINS HERE

Mr. Buckner: They were told that the women were all going to be raped and killed, and so forth, and not be seen in the first two or three days and then pretty soon the kids came out.

Mr. Rabalais: The kids were always the first ones.

Mr. Buckner: Yeah, the kids were the most common, and we gave them chocolate and things of this nature, and all of a sudden they were all over us, little kids coming out. You're right, the kids were the first ones.

Mr. Rabalais: I would imagine the men, the adult men, would probably be the most reluctant with the loss of face.

Mr. Buckner: But there was never one act of violence.

Mr. Rabalais: Just think, compare that today with Iraq. Under similar circumstances.

Mr. Buckner: Well, the thing was this. They were told to lay down their arms and even the hardened army, they didn't kill themselves. Then our company, our 26th Marines, broke up in Japan, see.

Mr. Rabalais: Oh, they did?

Mr. Buckner: Yes.

Mr. Rabalais: Not in the U.S. but in Japan?

Mr. Buckner: They broke up, and I went into the 28th Marines for two weeks, and then was transferred to the 2nd Marine Division at Kumamoto. The high point men were shipped back for discharge. I had to wait.

Mr. Rabalais: Where's that? In Japan?

Mr. Buckner: That was Japan, yeah, it was about seventy miles from Nagasaki. We were at an Imperial Japanese Marine base there in Kumamoto. And I stayed there for about, well, totally, about eight months.

Mr. Rabalais: Y'all were just an occupation force?

Mr. Buckner: Occupation force, destroying equipment.

Mr. Rabalais: Oh, destroying—I was gonna say, what kind of duty, you were destroying their equipment.

Mr. Buckner: I'll be honest with you (chuckles) it was a waste of my time as far as that goes, because after we destroyed all the equipment that was there, my main job was putting the flag up in the morning and taking it down at night.

Mr. Rabalais: You mentioned that earlier, you mentioned that earlier.

Mr. Buckner: They did offer school, classes, some of the lieutenants taught classes. I took an English class, because I knew I was gonna go college after I left the service. And so, but, they were getting athletic groups and things of this nature.

Mr. Rabalais: Then you took advantage, I gather, of the G.I. Bill when you got out?

Mr. Buckner: Oh yeah. I went clear through my master's degree and got my Superintendent of Schools Certification through the G.I. Bill.

Mr. Rabalais: What field was that in?

Mr. Buckner: Education. I was a teacher, and a principal, and superintendent of schools for thirty-one years. forty-one years altogether.

Mr. Rabalais: So many people I have talked to, veterans of Iwo, took advantage and couldn't say enough about what the G.I. Bill did for their lives.

Mr. Buckner: Completely transformed America. It really did that. Before the war two and three percent of, ah, particularly men went to college. Now a lot of them went to college, and of course, they could take anything, they didn't have to go to college.

Mr. Rabalais: They went to special schools, some of them, went to improve whatever they had done before, mechanic schools, diesel schools, all kinds of things, and it just improved America all the way around. That's the best spent money that we have ever had, that's for sure.

Mr. Buckner: I got six years of college through the G.I. Bill.

Mr. Rabalais: Paid books and tuition, if I'm not mistaken.

Mr. Buckner: Room, board, books, and tuition and a hundred and ten dollars, because I was married. A hundred and ten dollars a month plus room, board, and tuition.

Mr. Rabalais: In Japan for how long, several months?

Mr. Buckner: I was in Japan for ten months.

Mr. Rabalais: Oh, that long. Ten months. Were you ready to come home then?

Mr. Buckner: Yes, I was ready. I packed up and I intended to play on the regimental baseball team, but I had to sign over for another three months just to play on the regimental baseball team, and I wanted to be a baseball player and travel. It would have been quite something, you traveled all over the Far East playing baseball, but I'd been overseas for darn near two years, and I was ready to come home. And the Marine Corps was not going to be—if I'd have been an officer chances are I would have gone into the Reserves, but I was a corporal, and I wouldn't stay in the active Reserves for a corporal's rating.

Mr. Rabalais: Did you stay in the active Reserves?

Mr. Buckner: No.

Mr. Rabalais: 'Cause I was in the active Reserves.

Mr. Buckner: Fortunately because when the Korean War broke out, the active Reserves were called back.

Mr. Rabalais: You would have been called back. Yes, you would have been in many wars. That's a fact. Some stayed in, they said well what the heck, well, up to now I've got another two years in or three years in, I might as well go ahead and make a career out of it.

Mr. Buckner: Only one of our officers stayed in, that was Lieutenant Barber, and he became Colonel Barber, and he was in the Chosin Reservoir Retreat, got the Medal of Honor there.

Mr. Rabalais: Really. And that was the one you said was sort of a sticky wicket.

Mr. Buckner: He was a bear cat. He got what they called combat fatigue, and was gone most of the time. He got combat fatigue I think the first day we were attacking and then came back the day we were relieved for the last time, and became company commander on a temporary basis.

Mr. Rabalais: It's pretty hard, sometimes, to take some of that, sometimes. Some people take it different ways. Some of 'em can handle it, and some of 'em, it's a big responsibility, sometimes. But anyway, so you were sent back to the States. Were you relieved from the States, were you discharged from the States? From San Diego?

Mr. Buckner: At Great Lakes.

Mr. Rabalais: Oh, Great Lakes! Way up there.

Mr. Buckner: A lot of Marines at that time from the Middle West went to Great Lakes to be discharged.

Mr. Rabalais: I'll be darned. Did not know that.

Mr. Buckner: We went there, and then they discharged us from there, figured our best fare home. That was it. We had a medical checkup which was a joke, and I remember I went to a dentist, ah, you're all fine. Got home and in about three, four weeks later I went to the dentist and he said "Well, you've got about eight or ten cavities you're gonna have to have fixed."

Mr. Rabalais: Did men in uniform then get new clothes?

Mr. Buckner: Yeah, we had a uniform, we had a discharge button on it, and besides that, it didn't take long, we got out of Marine green.

Mr. Rabalais: I remember being shipped in green wool, in the Army, being shipped to Virginia in June, and that was the uniform in the northern posts, green wool. And I got shipped to Virginia and it was about ninety-six degrees, I was reporting in a green winter uniform. I felt like an idiot. Everybody was walking around in khakis. At that time they were trying to introduce Bermuda shorts. That didn't last very long. But I felt sort of silly.

Mr. Buckner: We had to wear a uniform because we didn't have anything else to wear home.

Mr. Rabalais: Exactly, no civvies.

Mr. Buckner: In fact, our sea bags, my sea bag with most of my things in didn't arrive 'til three or four months after I was discharged.

Mr. Rabalais: How were you able to bring that rifle back?

Mr. Buckner: The Japanese rifle?

Mr. Rabalais: Yeah.

Mr. Buckner: We were allowed to have a samurai sword and a rifle, as souvenirs, and they shipped them back.

Mr. Rabalais: What about a pistol?

Mr. Buckner: Didn't have a pistol. I know some of the officers probably, they could get by with it, but the enlisted men could never get by.

Mr. Rabalais: I talked to another seaman, and he had a Nambu pistol, and he wanted to bring that back because it was an unusual design.

Mr. Buckner: I had a small pistol that I carried all the time. In fact, I carried it on leave, just in case, I had a small pistol. And I wasn't about to bring it back. I did send back two rifles and two samurai swords, which one of 'em is a good one. The other one is a noncom officer's there, but the other one is an officer's sword.

Mr. Rabalais: Oh, you have samurais?

Mr. Buckner: I have one samurai and one non-com's saber. The samurais are over twenty-seven inches long.

Mr. Rabalais: Did the noncoms often carry a sword of some sort?

Mr. Buckner: Yeah, some of 'em did.

Mr. Rabalais: I think all the officers did.

Mr. Buckner: All the officers carried. Mine right now is about a hundred and sixty years old, over a hundred years old when I got it.

Mr. Rabalais: Really! How'd you find that out?

Mr. Buckner: They located it on the handle, when it was made. I got it rebuilt in Japan. I was fortunate. When I got to it, after the officers and noncoms got theirs first, mine was kind of ragged. And I was lucky I picked it up. In Japan they had sword makers. I think I paid two or three dollars to have it completely rebuilt and refinished.

Mr. Rabalais: Wow.

Mr. Buckner: It looked like a brand new one when I picked it up.

Mr. Rabalais: Sounds wonderful. The museum has gotten a few of those, and some of them are incredibly nice and some with etchings and things that are on there.

Mr. Buckner: I had mine appraised by a Japanese who was coming around trying to buy those. They'd like to buy every one they can.

Mr. Rabalais: Especially the old ones.

Mr. Buckner: And he told me that, he offered me fifteen hundred dollars for mine. Mine was made by a reputable sword maker but it had no family history on it. He said if it had a family history on it, it's worth a small fortune. Because these families in Japan, these old families, would pay anything to get them back. He said he paid a hundred thousand dollars to get one back.

Mr. Rabalais: Wow. A known family history.

Mr. Buckner: A known family history was on there, when he took that off, that family would pay anything to get that back, and the person had got it at a garage sale.

Mr. Rabalais: Oh my goodness. And that's what happens a lot of times when these veterans pass away, the widows and families are not sure what they have. I'll be darned. Robert, have you kept a scrapbook or anything like that?

Mr. Buckner: Yeah, I got a company kit, I got a scrapbook. I don't know whether they want it or not. I was fortunate to take oh, probably, fifteen or twenty pictures, particularly when I was in Hawaii, and I passed them out to a lot of my friends who didn't have anything. They were tickled to death. In fact, it was last year, I saw in the Marine, in the "Spearhead," that's the official magazine of the 5th Marine Division, that there was a person by the name of Herberger who wanted anybody that knew his father, Carl, and Carl was one of my best friends.

Mr. Rabalais: Really.

Mr. Buckner: I wrote to him, and I sent him two or three pictures of Carl, and he was just pleased.

Mr. Rabalais: He's passed away now?

Mr. Buckner: Yes, he's passed away. Carl's passed away, I didn't know that. He was kind of a quiet person and we'd lost contact afterwards. He was from Washington, D.C., and the kids were just tickled to death. I had three pictures of Carl, with me and a couple of others.

Mr. Rabalais: Did you bring Japanese documents of any sort? You know, like posters, or little flyers, or something like that?

Mr. Buckner: The only thing I had was a flag, and it has all kinds of names on it, that's what the Japanese did then. And I have a Japanese book, a crude little booklet, I don't even know what it is, to be honest with you. I got it, but I don't have any idea. The flag was sent back to the Mayor of Kumamoto. The flag I acquired belonged to the father of a woman who is currently head of the Social Democratic Party in Papan, and a member of the House of Councillors. Enclosed is a picture of the woman from the Tokyo newspaper.

Mr. Rabalais: Sometimes these documents are given, the Museum has some interest in some of these documents. So if the kids for some reason don't want that someday, they might want to contact the Nimitz.

Mr. Buckner: I have thought about giving, you see, a lot of the troops that were on Okinawa, the Japanese troops that were on Okinawa, were from Kumamoto.

Mr. Rabalais: The town, the province, of Kumamoto?

Mr. Buckner: Yeah. I have thought about sometimes donating the flag. Because it had a lot of personal, they said there was either family and friends would sign that.

Mr. Rabalais: The thing about the war is the gifts.

Mr. Buckner: And I thought about it, but I don't know. I never had any love for the Japanese.

Mr. Rabalais: Understandably so.

Mr. Buckner: It's never, I never got over the war as some people did.

Mr. Rabalais: You're not the only one.

Mr. Buckner: They were cruel, and there's some brutality that occurred that was just bad, but we weren't quite like they did.

Mr. Rabalais: Did you witness any brutality against the Japanese yourself by American troops? You're free to speak if you want to. You know, I have to put it on record.

Mr. Buckner: Well, the one thing that I didn't see them actually doing, but I saw it afterwards, but some of them killed a Japanese and took his teeth.

Mr. Rabalais: That occurred quite a bit.

Mr. Buckner: They had gold teeth, they'd flash gold teeth a lot. Seemed to be the Japanese, I don't why they had so many gold teeth. I don't know why anybody would want it, as far as that goes, but I saw the person there and that they pulled his teeth. I know one person that's got a lot of Japanese teeth. He didn't get them, he bought them from somebody. I think it's real repulsive.

Mr. Rabalais: Yes, that's repulsive. It should be.

Mr. Buckner: But they were dead, they weren't tortured to death, like they would have tortured a prisoner, which they did in a couple of—you've ever read Bradley's book.

Mr. Rabalais: No, I haven't.

Mr. Buckner: If you've ever read Bradley's book, his father, he was one of the flag raisers, he was really bitter toward Japanese.

Mr. Rabalais: Yes, I did read that. He was a corpsman.

Mr. Buckner: Because one of his very close friends was tortured to death, he was on Iwo Jima.

Mr. Rabalais: He had been captured and brought into a cave . . .

Mr. Buckner: Where he was tortured to death.

Mr. Rabalais: For a period of time. That was incredibly brutal, that's why you wouldn't talk about it. I did read that.

Mr. Buckner: And I've got the book that Bradley, he wrote this book *Flyboys*. About Chichi Jima, where President George H. W. Bush got shot down.

Mr. Rabalais: Yes, I read that book. President Bush dodged a very nasty bullet by not being captured, by being picked up by a submarine. Because he would have ended up on that island, and that would have been . . .

Mr. Buckner: He would have been killed and his liver eaten. History would be different.

Mr. Rabalais: As they found out later. Well, Robert, I don't want to keep you too much. I do want to thank you immensely on the part of the Museum. This is the kind of detailed

information that is precious to us. As I said, this is primarily gonna be used by historians, and the copy, it's gonna take us a while, a few months, we're short of transcribers. I'm trying to talk my wife into adding to our crew of transcribers. A draft copy will be sent to you for editing before we do anything. If you see anything on there that you want to strike out, change, alter, whatever, feel free to do it.

Mr. Buckner: I can't think of anything right now that's there, because there's so much. And, you know, the strange thing about it, a lot of people say, "How can you remember that long?" But you know, there's hardly a day goes by . . .

Mr. Rabalais: It made an impression on you, though.

Mr. Buckner: Yes. Some of these things you don't forget.

Mr. Rabalais: They make a very deep impression. You're youthful, and impressionable at that time.

Mr. Buckner: I'm just happy that we didn't have to go into Japan and kill children and women and so forth, like would have happened if the war had continued.

Mr. Rabalais: I am too. My father was headed there when the bomb was dropped. He was in the Army and they were slated to the southern end, and trained with Japanese style houses and he was just a combat grunt, and the war ended while he was on a troop ship, so for me, I'm glad.

Mr. Buckner: We were about two weeks away from loading. We probably would have gone to Okinawa as a staging area, I'm guessing. And then three Marine divisions would have been the spearhead into Kyushu, and then we would have been relieved by the Army.

Mr. Rabalais: One quick question for you that I ask everybody. When you heard about the atomic bomb, did you have any concept as to what it was?

Mr. Buckner: No.

Mr. Rabalais: Most everybody had no clue really what that really meant.

Mr. Buckner: We thought it was rumors. That was our first step, we thought that somebody was pulling our leg, that nothing could be that powerful.

Mr. Rabalais: Did you get by any one of the two cities and see the evidence of that?

Mr. Buckner: No. We were close to Nagasaki, but fortunately I never went in. Charlie Adams, a person I talked to today, said that he was in Nagasaki, but I was glad that I never went in.

Mr. Rabalais: Probably should be glad that you didn't, because a number of the people that I've interviewed that spent significant time, in Hiroshima, especially, where the radiation levels were extremely high, today are fighting thyroid cancers and things like that, and they seem to think this is directly attributable to the exposure. He also had been stationed, then, at Bikini Atoll, which didn't help matters either. So let me close this for you, and again, on behalf of the Museum, we thank you immensely, Mr. Buckner, and we thank you for our country.

Transcribed by: Betty Paieda
Harbor City, California
May 14, 2011