

**THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR  
(Nimitz Museum)**

**NIMITZ EDUCATION AND RESEARCH CENTER  
Fredericksburg, TX 78624**

**Interview with**

**CHARLES KILPATRICK  
U. S. MARINE CORPS**

## ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

### CHARLES KILPATRICK

September 17, 2005. I am interviewing Mr. Charles Kilpatrick. This interview is taking place in Fredericksburg, Texas. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies, Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Parks and Wildlife for the preservation of historic information related to this cite. Charles, you might just say where you were born and your parents, if you want to start the interview there.

MR. KILPATRICK: I think maybe I'll just start when I was finishing school and joined the Marine Corps. I did as soon as my mother would let me. I didn't have a birth certificate. I was born in a little town that didn't believe in birth certificates so I had to have her permission to go. So she finally let me go and I joined the Marine Corps in 1942. When I was called up I went to Parris Island to boot camp and from there I was selected to go to officer's training school, Quantico, Virginia. Went there for three months and then I went three months in officers' infantry training school. Then I was sent to Camp Lejuene, North Carolina, and spent three months in artillery school. Then I went to California and went to tank school and also learned how to drive a bulldozer while I was waiting to go overseas.

Finally the ship came, I went overseas as a company commander of a replacement ??? battles that were going on, got to Hawaii stayed there three or four days. Then was assigned to the 6<sup>th</sup> Marine Division, 15<sup>th</sup> Marines and Artillery outfit which was in Guadalcanal. We flew twenty-four hours down to Guadalcanal where I joined the unit

and as I fully expected was named the forward artillery observer for one of the batteries that tie in with work. We had three infantry regiments, the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, the 22<sup>nd</sup> Marines and the 29<sup>th</sup> Marines. Artillery observers like we had a team of twelve men and we worked with each of those three regiments whenever we were needed. Whenever an observer was wounded and had to be replaced one of us would go over there with our team. So as a result during the eighty-two days on Okinawa I worked with all three of those regiments and almost always with the front line platoon. Occasionally we're in the company command post and where the infantry officers were telling where they wanted the artillery put and then that is what I would do. The most dangerous job in the Marine Corps is the platoon leader; second most dangerous job is the artillery observer who is there with him which was what I did.

So we sailed all over the Pacific and ended up in Okinawa. Of course by then we knew. We had been briefed and studied maps such as they were; the maps were not very good. They had a lot of white spots on them; planes took them on cloudy days. If there was a cloud there you had a white spot which made it a little dangerous for the people on the ground when you're shooting artillery around them. When you've got maybe an area a hundred yards wide you're not exactly sure you know where they are but I landed with the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines on the beaches. We were expecting the usual welcome committee from the Japanese and didn't happen. We didn't hear a shot fired. We cut quickly across the narrow part of the island, at that point about three miles, then turned north with the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines and walked about thirty miles up the eastern coast clearing that out with not too much fighting, came back down walked the thirty miles back down, cut across the

peninsula again and then went up the western side to the peninsula there and the principle beach there was something called Yakki Taki mountain and that was very hard fighting. Stayed there for about two weeks then we pulled out and went down to the south and helped replace an army division that had been shot up, 27<sup>th</sup> army division. We went into the firing line just below the Yaddo Maru airfield and then we were the westernmost unit and to our left was the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division. Beyond them were two other army divisions, very good divisions, I might say. They had one extra army division which backed them up and took places when they needed to rest or recuperation.

What I am talking about at the seminar here today they asked me to speak about breaking the main defense line of the Japanese which called Yavaru, Shuri, and Naha, three towns that rested on it. They were on a very high mountainous stone ridge looking down on the lower part where we were and so we crossed into something called the Hassa Oyua Estuary and immediately turned to the southeast. At that point the island was about five miles wide and we could see in the distance the wreck of a six-story building shot up pretty good from naval gunfire. Turned out to be a sugar mill that had been destroyed and it had two very high concrete smoke stacks, probably a hundred feet high. We soon found out that there were people up in the top of those smoke stacks looking down on us calling in the artillery. The artillery was located on the Shuri escarpment which is the backbone of that part of the island used to be the ancient Chinese capitol when it belonged to China. From there they had an eaglet's eye view; it was like watching a football game from a helicopter. So pretty soon we made the attack on the sugar mill and we got through there without too much serious trouble.

On the other side was a hill we called Charlie Hill. Every hill had to have a name on it so to be sure all of us knew we were talking about the same piece of ground. It didn't look like much, wasn't very high but the closer we got we began to think there was a whole lot more to it than we realized. We finally took it and we found out that place was just honeycomb with caves and tunnels, firing courts, and every time we fired artillery or mortars they run into caves and stay there. So we took that.

Then in the distance there was another hill which was larger, didn't look like much, you know, might be sixty, seventy feet high and so we called that Sugar Loaf because it looked like a sugar loaf. Then over to the right of it there was another small fortress called Horseshoe and over to the left there was another small hill that we shared with the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division. We soon found out we were in a hornet's nest because all three of those hills were honeycomb with protection, some people were down as much as twenty-five, thirty feet below the surface. So we pulled up and with the 22<sup>nd</sup> Marines we made the first assault on Sugar Loaf Hill. I don't have the statistics in front of me but I do recall a hundred and fifty men went up with the normal complement of officers and they came back down with four officers and forty men and they went up with five flame-thrower tanks and one tank came down. So we realized then that we really were in great difficulty. So we spent the next ten days assaulting those same places. We would go up to the top and the infantry would be loaded down with all the hand grenades that they could carry and get to the precipice and lob the hand grenades over on the other side where the Japanese were. They had emplacements back into the caves where the hand

grenades didn't really do very much good unless one of them just happened by chance come up short. We ran out of ammunition, we ran out of grenades, we'd get kicked off down at the bottom of the hill. It was made of volcanic and rock from the sea, it was back and forth, up and down, up and down and then all at once it began to rain, torrential rains. There we are, of course every man had to have a two-man foxhole and one had to stay awake all the time while the other tried to get a little sleep. Then when we began to get very, very heavy shell fire we could tell it was coming from the high ground in front of us and a little bit over to the right where the Shuri Castle had been. As it rained the foxholes started filling up with water, everybody was soaking wet had mud all over you. The Japanese were making counter attacks and all across the face of this hill that we were under there were bodies, parts of bodies of the Japanese that had been blown up by artillery fire. It had an awful smell and of course nobody got any sleep and you try to eat rations. You'd open it up, when you did there was a horde of black flies that had been over eating those Japanese bodies would come over and land on that. You had your hand full of food you're trying to get in your mouth it's all covered with flies. So you had to develop a technique of sweeping the flies off and throwing the food in your mouth real quickly weren't always successful in getting rid of all the flies so you didn't eat very much. I went into that campaign weighing one hundred and ninety-two pounds. I came out weighing one hundred and sixty-eight pounds. During the eighty-two days I don't suppose I had as much as one, some days no meals at all, normal meal. It was back and forth like that.

Casualties were terrible and the rain got so deep and the mud got so deep that suddenly we stopped getting supplies. We weren't getting any shells, any hand grenades, any food, any water because the mud was so deep that tanks and amphibious tanks and even bulldozers would sink down as much as three feet down in the mud so they couldn't haul it to us. So we had to take every man who wasn't actually on the firing line shooting a rifle walk downhill through that mud maybe two hundred yards, three hundred yards, and pick up a load of that, pick up a five-gallon can of water plenty heavy for one person. When you take a step you go down in the mud clear over your shoes and your shoes fill up with mud. People had to carry wooden cases of rifle ammunition, took two men to do that, one on each side. We carried K rations and we weren't getting any artillery shells at all. Finally they rationed how much I could fire because we were running low. When I'd get a target out there I'd have to get on the phone with the tie-in and try to sell them on the idea that this was worth expending shells and sometimes they'd let me fire four or five or something like that. Sometimes they'd say we just can't go, we gotta save them, we think there may be a big night attack. So that wasn't very encouraging, same thing with the mortars. Interesting thing about the mortars, mortar as a sixty millimeter mortar is the one the infantry relies on. It's round and maybe three and a half or four inches across, just fits the shell that goes down in it. It sits on a metal plate and when you drop it down there you fire the force goes against the metal plate like that. Well, after about the first day of these heavy rains it started driving that metal plate down in the mud, instead of being straight on line like that, it might lean a little to the right, lean a little to the left, little down, maybe up, and you're putting the shell where you didn't want it, not where the Japanese were and sometimes where your own people were. So that created a

terrible problem and they had nothing to put under it, there was no wood, there was no rock, or anything so it just meant you had to reduce the amount of mortars that you fired. We start getting replacements and they were coming through. These were kids without a whole lot of training and many of them were wounded or killed on the first day they were there and nobody in their company or platoon leader even knew what their names were. That was the saddest part of it. The wounded had to be carried down, like we carried the ammunition and food up, with a stretcher. Took four people to do it and all the time we were getting a tremendous volume artillery and mortar fire day and night, all day long, all night, nobody got any sleep. You had to stay alert and almost every night the Japanese would make a night attack and everybody would be fighting and shooting all around you. So that went on took us ten days to do that. Finally it stopped raining and spirits increased a whole lot and we finally managed to take Sugar Loaf hill.

Then continuing on down on the other side into a big valley and there was still a lot of hard fighting to come there. I'd never been to the top of Sugar Loaf 'cause I wasn't supposed to go that far with the infantry because I was supposed to deliver the artillery fire. If I went up there and got shot then they wouldn't have anybody to help them with artillery. So I climb up to the top and I jump in a big shell hole and I see this huge valley, just a wonderful view of the Shearer Massib and to the side. This is going to be great I'll be able to fire from here and see all of this and I needed room. There was the body of a marine in the hole with me so I grabbed him by the feet to move him and the top half was gone. This is kind of messy, white grubs on him, maggots came pouring out of him. I put him to one side and I got up to look and just as I stuck my head up I felt the



compression air of a shell come in. You could feel it if you were close enough, it zoomed over and hit behind us. I ducked back down and in a minute I hear another one coming and it hit in front. Well, any artour(?) that's called being bracketed, you fire three shots, one's in front, one's behind and the next one's going to be where you are, so I dived over the edge of that shell hole and rolled down about half down, the third round hit up on top and I missed that. That was the time when we broke through the western edge of this which was the main line of defense. At the same time the other three divisions we were lined up with were making progress, too. They broke through and the Japanese realized they had to pull back so they pulled back to the next line of defense.

My group swung over to the south to a last ridge above the city of Naha, which was the capitol of the island, and that was a fierce battle there. They were trying to keep us off because there we could look down on the city and we had the good view. That took several days to do that, it was really a fierce battle. I fired lots of ammunition that time. So then after that we went through the city of Naha which had been pretty well destroyed and ended up at the end of town. There was a seaport there and by then we were eight miles further down from the beaches. So we conceived the idea we could clear that port out. There was a peninsula on the other side called the Roquer. It fell to our group to go clear that out and the port marines stayed on the land and met us and cut off the mouth of that peninsula and to get there we had a shorter shore landing. We got on our landing boats instead of trying to fight our way across the wide river there, sailed around to the other side behind them and got off and then began the attack there. That took us ten or twelve days to do that and we had heavy casualties there, two or three thousand men

killed or wounded and finally that really broke them. Part of that should have been included in this artificial line Yunabaru line because we didn't know what was over there. The reason I'm bringing it up it was the best constructed defense that we found in the whole. Some of the rooms were as big as a school room, they had barracks where the men could sleep, commanding officer had a huge room with carpet on the floor, and they had galleys there to cook the food. One of those was three stories deep, three different levels. We had to get them out of there and the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, in the part they had, discovered a tunnel one day. They went in that tunnel and the tunnel was all the way across the peninsula to the other side. So they used that as a conduit and went over and when they got there we had a circle completely around them. Then we had to be careful in firing, stop shooting artillery when you look your guys are on the other side over there maybe a half mile or three quarters of a mile over there. I was always tired and sleepy so since we wouldn't have anything to do I lay down on the ground and I needed a pillow. There was a big steel drum of communication wire over there. I drug that over and put my head on it and had my helmet on and went to sleep. Two or three guys standing up around me talking and all at once came an ???, herder sound, like a herd. I finally shook up and woke up and I looked up and the guy had been standing at my feet a Japanese mortar had hit him and killed him. The other guy standing there took his hand away from his face and his nose had been cut off and I wasn't feeling any pain because I had a tremendous concussion. The burned place where it hit was about eighteen inches behind my head but the steel roll of wire was between me so it went up like that. I got the back of my head and the back of my neck filled up with small pieces of shrapnel but it didn't hit any nerves. It was all around my spine so I was very fortunate there. And so we kind

of had a rule in that outfit if you could walk and talk and use your shooting arm, you didn't go anywhere with wounds like that, and of course I didn't. I wouldn't have left because it would have left my people up there. So we started to dry up in there and we went on down and took oh, another week or twelve days, I guess, to get to the end of the island.

I was one of the people that had the fortunate thing happen. I went at the beginning to the very northernmost part of the island and looked three hundred and fifty miles to Japan and at the end I ended up at the water on the other end looking out into the China Sea so I come sixty miles. All but about two miles of that had walked. This was the ridge you may have heard about that the Japanese soldiers had girlfriends or women and babies and they all had been told we would torture everybody, we'd rape the women, we'd eat the children, and kill the men. These Japanese soldiers were throwing those one and two-year old children over the side of the cliff down on the rocks about fifty or sixty feet down. They would give the women a hand grenade and if they didn't use it a man would come up. To set off a Japanese grenade you have to knock them together, reach out and put one hand by the woman's head and the other hand by his head and blow both their heads off. They would kill probably half of them like that.

Then the last thing I did in ???, I was up on top of this ridge and they called me from regimental headquarters and said, "Can you see a hill on" they gave me the coordinates on the map, "it's not a big hill and it's got a radio tower on it?" I looked down over there and about I guess a half mile away and I said, "Yeh, I can see it." "Well, that's the

Japanese command headquarters for the whole island and we're going to fire 28 battalions of artillery on it and you're going to do it." So I said, "Okay" and gave them the coordinates and had them fire one round of white phosphorous smoke. It was a little bit off so I made the adjustment and that's on fire for effect. They must have shot a million dollars worth of shell into that thing just kicking it up in dust. I'm sitting here thinking after eighty-two days they don't know any better than that 'cause if that's where all the generals and colonels are they're down there about twenty-five or thirty below. I heard someone say at the seminar today, some of them were sixty feet down there. And all it was doing was just making it a little dusty. So finally that was the last shot that I fired and later on marines went down there and went in and they found the top six generals had committed hari kiri, cut themselves open in the stomach. So then we pulled back and then we had to send patrols and clean out all the Japanese we missed and a lot of this was heavily wooded looked like oak trees. Finally I guess about two weeks later we got off the island and we looked back and, of course we hoped we'd never see that place again.

Then we looked even further north and we all knew very well that three hundred and fifty miles from the tip of that island to Japan we were going back to Guam. We knew who was going to go to Japan. So we went back to Guam to a tent camp that had been prepared for us and hadn't been there about ten days when they briefed us said, "Yes, we're going to Japan. Sixth Division is going. You're going to be part of fifteen divisions that are going to land in Kayushu, the southernmost island. Then survivors in that will go around and twenty-five divisions are going to sail into Tokyo Bay and land

there. We estimate that there will be a minimum of one million casualties and we didn't doubt that at all because we knew then those people were digging like they had on Okinawa. All those tremendous defenses, better than anything I ever saw, they did in four months time so they had longer time than that in Kayushu and then in Tokyo Bay. We saw that because after we got back and the war was suddenly over and we got the word that the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines are going to Japan and ??? will be going with us. So kind of looked forward to that, we'd get to go to Japan. And, incidentally, at that time we had already closed down our camp, had all of our equipment replaced, had uniforms, shoes for everybody, and we were ready to go. So anybody that ever tells you it wasn't a good idea to drop the bomb on Hiroshima, realize it saved a million American young boys, most of them seventeen, eighteen, nineteen years old, lives. Now the reason we know it was defended like that, just before we left we got word you're not going but the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion is going. Our ??? who was married to an admiral's daughter who had a lot of pull and she lived in Hawaii and had gotten him a one-week leave. We didn't know he was gone and he was in Hawaii, so they said, "He's not here so you can't go." So we missed going to Japan.

After that we went to North China and stayed there eight months. Then the battalion was sent to Japan after about a month and a half came on over and they told us what they found which was from the water line twenty-one miles to Tokyo ever foot of it, ever yard of it, was entrenched and barricades and tunnels and caverns just like we'd faced. So it would have been a blood bath and probably a million casualties. I don't know how they

came up with that number. It would probably have been low because they missed the amount that we had on Iwo and the amount that we missed on Okinawa.

The only light-hearted thing I can tell you about the whole operation was we went through Naha, the Capitol, and it was destroyed. Most of the city was of stone and our guys, we had all kinds of explosives, found a bank. They took C-2 and blew the door off this bank and it was full of yen and everybody got all the yen he wanted. We got it for souvenirs. I just stuffed my pockets full of it never thinking it would be worth anything. We'd already been told that they already issued an American currency that we were going to spend some where. I don't know where they thought we would spend it there. Then after this battalion got to Japan everybody started getting letters from their friend, for god's sake, send us that Japanese money. You can spend it up here. So I took all the money I had and put it in a manila envelope and mailed it to one of my classmates and he was able to spend it. Outside of that there were no light moments at all for I think it was eighty-two days, almost three months there.

It was even worse than I've told you because you had this terrible smell, everybody smelled, nobody had changed clothes for ten or twelve days and dirty and you had blood on you and you had parts of bodies on you. After eating with your hands and those flies, everybody got diarrhea or dysentery. The only place you could relieve yourself was to get out of your hole and then you took your live in your hands and used the space next to you. They were shelling so much you just had to do it inside where you'd lie down. You can't imagine even the smell of the explosives, there were thousands of rounds of

artillery shells that came in there. I think we probably had as much damage done mentally for the people of the constant around the clock sound of mortars and artillery shells going off and the sound that we made returning that fire. We didn't have many people that had combat fatigue but we had a lot of people who had Asiatic looks, what we call a thousand yard stare just looking off and not thinking anything. We lost a few that were just completely gone. I saw one company commander, a captain, who really was a fine officer had been in Guadalcanal and Russell Islands and up there and he just broke down. I was there six feet from him and he said, "I can't do it anymore. I can't send anymore boys out there to get killed."

MR. WHITSON: When you came back from China to Japan or did you come all the way from China, I mean back into the final place?

MR. KILPATRICK: We were in a place called Tsing Tau which was the largest seaport in Asia, large enough to put every ship in the world in and we'd been there eight months. We had a chance to recover and we were there to repatriate Japanese civilians who arrived there in 1933 took over all the commercial parts of it. Then there was a huge army camp out there and I don't know how many people there. I've heard sixty thousand, I've heard a hundred thousand, and so we had to bring them into town and put them on a ship and take them back to Japan. That was easy because they cooperated, we didn't have any trouble. Our other job was to maintain the city and keep the communists from getting it because they'd bring Chinese divisions in from Indo China and we would outfit them. They had more equipment than our own men had, automatic rifle, Tommy gun. They'd march out in the mountains never be heard from again, go out there and join

the communist side. So we left and went to Shanghai, stayed Shanghai three or four days. That was interesting because a very cosmopolitan city, the bad part about it we didn't have any money. I know five or six of us went into a place somebody had recommended a French restaurant in the French quarter. We went up the elevator fancy nightclub, looked at the menu and we all pooled our money and we had enough to have one beer each. We left and we had nowhere to go had no money, had to get paid, had to have special orders. Then we went back to San Diego and that's where we were all going to return from active duty. Officers were still members of reserves, couldn't get out and so I stayed in the reserve because I was convinced that before too long if we weren't fighting Russia we'd be fighting the Chinese. I had already discovered that being a private was not nearly as good as being an officer and I stayed in the reserve until 1962 and then I retired as a Lt. Col. of the battalion commander of a reconnaissance battalion. I don't draw a pension from it; I didn't have twenty years that qualified for it. I don't know whether I'd take it anyhow. That pretty well ended my career. I decided I'd a whole lot rather be a lieutenant colonel than a private.

MR. WHITSON: You had one more thing you wanted to add.

MR. KILPATRICK: Speaking of casualties when I got commissioned Quantico, Virginia, there were four hundred and twenty people in the class. We got overseas in time enough people in that class to go to Palalu, Iwo Jima, Okinawa, and battles like that. Some time in the mid fifties, late fifties, no, in the early sixties, I was promoted to lieutenant colonel. In the Marine Corps you are promoted by seniority; doesn't make any difference whether you're a good officer or bad officer if you're still eligible you get it. I looked at that list and I went through and I found three people's names from my class of



four hundred and twenty. All had gone overseas as second lieutenants, were all of them casualties, killed, I don't know. The majority of them probably were wounded and that got them out of the reserve. I bet a few of them were court-martialed but my feeling is that overwhelming majority of them never lived through the war. Then you can't help but sit there and ask yourself the question, who picked these three guys out and who selected the others. That's an enormous statistic but I'm sure the majority of them were at least wounded badly. I know a number of them were killed. We had no way of communication after that, we didn't even know what divisions we went to; we went through like three winds.

Transcribed November 11, 2011, by Eunice Gary.