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National Museum of the Pacific War



**Center for Pacific War Studies
Oral History Program**

**Mr. Robert R. Shiels, Jr.
WW II - U.S. Army - Guadalcanal
[Communications Officer]
Date of Interview: April 6, 2006**

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Fredericksburg, Texas

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This is April 6, 2006. This is Ned Smith and I'm interviewing Mr. Robert T. Shields, Jr.. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies, Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War.

Mr. Smith: Bob, where and when were you born?

Mr. Shields: I was born in Parkridge, Illinois, of parents that were from Texas. They moved me back to Dallas when I was 6 months old, and I was reared in Dallas.

Mr. Smith: I assume that you went to school in Dallas?

Mr. Shields: Yes, I went to grade school at William Lipscomb and High School at Woodrow Wilson High School in Dallas. At the time they had Junior ROTC and so I had four years of Junior ROTC Infantry along with High School. Every summer we spent a month out at Mineral Wells for camp, and had drill and rifle practice, etc., out there.

Mr. Smith: As I understand it, you are an Aggie?

Mr. Shields: Yes, when I was graduated from Woodrow in '36, I went to Texas A&M, and at that time it was an all-male school, and most of the new recruits were in the ROTC Corps, and lived as such. They had, at that time, all units of the Army, Infantry, Field Artillery, which I was in, Signal Corps, Cavalry, Chemical

Warfare, Engineers, Coast Artillery, etc. So I spent four years there and came out with a Bachelor of Science of Electrical Engineering. I came out as the Lt Colonel in charge of the Field Artillery Regiment.

Mr. Smith: How many siblings did you have?

Mr. Shiels: Unfortunately my wife and I didn't have any?

Mr. Smith: I mean your siblings.

Mr. Shiels: Oh, my siblings. I have one brother, who is approximately two years younger than I am.

Mr. Smith: I understand he was also artillery?

Mr. Shiels: He followed me through schooling in high school and later on into the military, etc. We were both graduated from A&M as Field Artillery Reserve Officers, 2nd Lieutenants.

Mr. Smith: OK, you did you have a commission in the reserve when you graduated?

Mr. Shiels: Yes, that is correct. The ROTC cadre wanted me to join the Regular Army, but I didn't exactly wish to at that time. The Colonel in charge, who talked with a lisp, said, "Mr. Shiels, we get you anyway." Sure enough, they did.

Mr. Smith: Where did you go on active duty?

Mr. Shiels: I was called on active duty shortly after December 7th. I had been working, after graduating from A&M, for the General Electric Company, and ended up doing a lot of defense order business. In other words I was a Production Engineer for General Electric Company that made, and in fact under my control they had me develop a line of alternating current electrical controllers

for oil tankers that were, at that time, building in mass. I also during my stay there helped do the final tests on submarine engines and some of the controls that I worked on were for Liberty ships and also for floating dry docks, large steel mill motors and control, etc. I had been working hard in the Defense industry, and when I was called on active duty my first orders were I received a wire on Thursday to report to Camp Tyson, Tennessee Barrage Balloon Training Center the following Monday. With all of this Defense business on my desk I asked for a one week's extension citing these Defense orders that I needed to turn over in an orderly fashion so they wouldn't be delayed. They came back with a cancellation of those orders. Then, a few weeks later, I got orders to report to Camp Roberts, California, Field Artillery refresher, etc.

Mr. Smith: Were you working for GE on December 7th?

Mr. Shiels: That is correct, in Schenectady, NY, or in that area.

Mr. Smith: When you heard that Pearl Harbor had been bombed, you figured that you were on the way about that time?

Mr. Shiels: Well, yes, we figured that we could be on the way. We just had to wait and see. I was doing important Defense work as it stood, and having gotten orders and then cancelled, I knew I was going to get some others soon.

Mr. Smith: What were the following orders?

Mr. Shiels: Well, as I said, they were to report to Camp Roberts, California. I reported there and I believe they gave me three weeks to get there from the East Coast to the West, and I stopped in El Paso and visited my former roommate, who

had been called up, and was then serving with the 7th Cavalry Division. I spent a day with him and learned what they were doing. I went on to Camp Roberts, and after a couple of weeks of refresher course, they had 12 of us in like fashion, we were all new officers. They advised us that they had secret orders for us and to report to Headquarters for us at midnight that night, which we did. Those orders were to report to Presidio San Francisco, which as you know is a beautiful, old fort above the bridge at San Francisco. This was during the Battle of Bataan, before Corregidor fell, and the old Colonel that gave us the orders says, "Fellows, I don't know where you are going, but my only advice is to save the last bullets for yourselves." That was rather encouraging!

Mr. Smith: At Camp Roberts they did give you some refreshing ...

Mr. Shiels: Yes, I spent two weeks refreshing on Field Artillery, Fire Control Equipment, etc.

Mr. Smith: After your tour there at the Presidio, what happened?

Mr. Shiels: Well, we were at the Presidio for ten days or so, and they kept saying report in at 9 o'clock every morning. Finally, they had orders for us and turned out that they sent us over to Oakland into a big, empty warehouse, or it was empty of product. They assigned each of us, or gave each of us, a provisional company with a Corporal of new aircraft mechanics. Our job was to keep them in this warehouse until further orders. That was a lesson, but anyway, we managed to do it. The kids were bored to tears, and of course they

wanted to go into San Francisco, so it was a job of herding them and keeping them in line. Anyway, we finally got orders and were taken down to the harbor and put aboard one of the President liners. I don't recall the name of it. Incidentally, we were told not to keep any notes or anything of that nature that might be found on us and give the enemy help, take no pictures, and that sort of thing. So everything I say is from memory. After a considerable period of zig-zagging across the Pacific we ended up in Honolulu. We landed in Honolulu Harbor, which is next to Pearl Harbor, and the aircraft mechanics were turned over to the Air Force, and the other eleven fellows and myself were sent to Schofield Barracks, which is about 33 miles inland from Honolulu. We were put in quarantine because they were concerned about yellow jaundice, etc. After quarantine we were assigned to regular Army units that were already at Pearl Harbor when the war came. I was the first officer replacement to the 8th Field Artillery Battalion, which was part of the 27th Infantry Combat Team. The 27th Infantry is an old, regular Army outfit that had been in China, for example, in the '20's and had never been to the States. They were withdrawn from China to Hawaii, and most of the cadre old, regular Army people, etc. The high officers were all West Pointers, and the Captains and below were Reservists that had been in the service for some years. They had all been over for quite a period of time, so I was the "green horn" and junior officer, and assigned all of the duties that are befit a junior officer, such as Officers' Mess, training of new recruits, training of the guard.

I was a communications officer and the Motor Pool Officer. I forget what else. Everything else they loaded on me.

Mr. Smith: The fact that you were put in quarantine reminds me – where did they start your series of shots? Before you left the States, or ...

Mr. Shiels: Yes. We were given a shot with about everything at the Presidio.

Mr. Smith: In the Navy at each station change we would go through another series of shots? Was the Army similar?

Mr. Shiels: I think they kept better records, and my memory is that we were shot at the Presidio, but I can't remember for sure. It could have been Camp Roberts. One of my other duties with the Battery was Fire Control. They were on alert an hour before sunset and an hour before sunrise every morning, live ammunition in the guns, and dummy orders given just to exercise the guns, and that kind of thing.

Mr. Smith: Tell us a little bit about the guns. Were they up to date?

Mr. Shiels: Well, the Table of Equipment for Field Artillery Battalion supporting a Regiment at that time was three gun batteries of 105mm howitzers and one supply battery. We had those three batteries and then we also had attached to us a seven gun 155mm howitzer battery that was located inside the crater of the Punch Bowl, which you know is within range of Pearl Harbor, out to Diamondhead – that whole Hawaiian Beach area. Since they were in place it was easy enough to control them from one spot. We had OP's in the hotels and other prominent spots, and 35mm guns on the beaches.

Mr. Smith: Let's set the time again now. When did you arrive?

Mr. Shiels: I arrived in late March of '42 in Hawaii. My particular headquarters battery was located in the Roosevelt High School, which I understand is still there. The high school is two stories of high school and a basement, and my headquarters battery lived in the basement. We had a double apron barbed wire all the way around the school, but the school was being used by the children in the daytime. We were considerable below Table of Organization in manpower. Nearly all of our cadre were old-timers, well trained and well liked, so as a young officer I followed the old rule of when I didn't know what to do, tell a Sergeant to do it to see that it got done. When in doubt I would have a good NCO do the job.

Mr. Smith: Your relationship with the Sergeants ...

Mr. Shiels: We had some very good ones.

Mr. Smith: Was General Short still in charge at that time?

Mr. Shiels: I'm not sure whether General Short — here I'm a lowly officer, way down the line, and I've got a lot of new duties and more to do in a day than I know how to do. We didn't get any radio news, etc., so I know that General Rhinehart I think was our Division Commander at the time, but I'm not sure.

Mr. Smith: Did you have a feeling though that things were becoming better organized at this period in time?

Mr. Shiels: Well I joined them and they had been stable. I joined them about three months after Pearl Harbor, and they were pretty stable, but no one obviously

knew what was going to happen next. What the Japs could do. From our positions there we could see the ships come and go from Pearl Harbor. For example, we saw the Lexington come back from the Coral Sea listing, etc. We saw the ships go out to Midway. It was a great relief when we learned the results of the Battle of Midway. The capabilities of the Japs were unknown to us. I'm talking about at the lower Army level, and I was as low as you could get and still be an officer. There was much apprehension as to what could happen. I didn't get a pass for weeks and weeks. I didn't need one. In the meantime, the main news we got was what was going on in the Phillipines – the Battle of Bataan. We were very apprehensive.

Mr. Smith: Then what was your next assignment?

Mr. Shiels: We were on Honolulu for about six months. As time went on, of course, the Regular Army Officers were moved on up to other positions. The Colonels and Majors, and some of the Captains were West Pointers, and of course they were needed elsewhere so they moved along. When I first reported, Colonel Ristine, our Battalion Commander, was just like the ad you see for Scotch Whiskey on a billboard – a little dapper white mustache, riding crop, riding boots, etc. He looked precisely like that. When he looked at my MSO and saw that I had a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering he says, "You are assigned to Headquarters Battery." Headquarters Battery does all of the communications, in charge of radio and telephone, etc. I was disappointed in that because I always felt that I could shoot well, but anyway ... So I was

quite busy. Among other things while we were there, the Battery had a motor sailor of the old type, the old Navy, double end, white, _____ construction with a little bridge deck on the stern with a tiller. We were assigned one of those and I captained that, pulling moving targets – pulling a towed float with targets on it, from Diamondhead down to the entrance of Pearl Harbor about once a week. It had a thousand yard tow line and that was fun because I always liked small boats.

Mr. Smith: Where were the guns that were shooting at it?

Mr. Shiels: They were on the beach. Most of them were 37mm anti-tank guns. It gave them moving target practice. At times we would station stationary targets out there and shoot at that with the artillery from out in the hills. The Battery Commander received a promotion, and so I inherited the Battery as Headquarters Battery Commander after three or four months. Everybody else moved up, and then in late September, or October, they moved us to Schofield Barracks and we knew we were going overseas. I know that Colonel Ristine was being assigned to Christmas Island, and a couple of the Lieutenants went with him, the old-time Lieutenants. We were to be assigned to MacArthur and were heading for Australia, and supposedly up into New Guinea, etc. So when they loaded us out of Honolulu we were cargo loaded. That is not combat loaded, but cargo loaded. Combat loading you put the things you need first on the beach on the top so you can get to them in the order that you need them. When you are cargo loaded, we were to unload at

dockside with cranes, so all of our artillery ammunition was in the bottom of the boat, and then next heaviest things. We took our 2 ½ ton trucks apart, for example, the wheels off and the cabs off. That was all stored in the very bottom. Jeeps and half-tons were not stripped down like that. In our smallest box that our equipment was in measured 19 cubic feet and a limit of 600 pound, so they were like a big desk you might say, or a little larger. The only things that were smaller was what we carried on our back. So that is the way we were loaded out and we finally departed on a President's Liner ship. I forget the name of the president, but anyway it had served as a commercial liner before the war. The convoy consisted of 15 destroyers, a couple of cruisers, and I think there were seven or eight of us APA's and AP's, and then there was even a submarine tagging along. We went way south of Christmas Island because the Japanese owned most of the western Pacific. As we came into the area of the Fijis we put into Fiji Island at the capital, and our division commander, _____? _____ Collins, after the Guadalcanal campaign he was sent over to Europe, and on D-Day in Europe he commanded a corps that took Cherbourg and that side of the thing. Later he was Chief of Staff. A very personable and articulate, and I think a very solid guy. When General Collins came back to the fleet – he flew over to visit Admiral Halsey, and when he returned we were told that the Marines had some reinforcements that were headed for Guadalcanal. A transport had been sunk or injured. I never did get the details, but they needed replacements/reinforcements in

Guadalcanal badly. So instead of going to Brisbane to unload dockside, they gave us five destroyers and the cruiser stayed back. We went up the slot to where the fighting was and it was kind of amusing to us, but anyway, they unloaded us on the beach with LCP's, the old landing craft that you had to jump over the bow. It was before the LCVP's. We spent the night in the jungle, just out on the ground – wherever they could find us. They had cautioned us about getting itchy at night. They had us take all of the ammunition away from our men. Our field artillery carried 1903 Springfields, and so we took all of the ammunition away from them. We trusted the Marines who were holding the perimeter. We spent the first night and then the guys acclimated a little bit. In the meantime, and I don't know who did it, the Navy I guess, but anyway some way they got some of our big boxes ashore and they got some of our trucks ashore and put them together – put the wheels on and the cabs on, etc. They already had some bulldozers. I think our engineers must have reinforced the Marines. I was so busy with my own housekeeping and taking care of 200+ men, and I was also playing hotel manager for a Colonel, two Majors, three Captains, in addition to myself and the training of all their technical people. I had my own Communications Group to take care of. I really didn't have any spare time.

Mr. Smith: It would have been interesting to see how those ships were unloaded, being the way things had been loaded.

Mr. Shiels: Yes. I'm not familiar with the detail of how they did it, but I know it was a

chore. Those AP's had to get the cargo out, ammunition ashore, etc. That was in the bottom of the holes, so they had to do it to LCT's. I don't know – that wasn't my job. Anyway, in the meantime, we got our orders telling us which sector to go into and pick out our CP's and our headquarters battery locations. The engineers had to bulldoze roads back into those things because on the beach you had coconut groves, and then as you got into hilly land there were no roads or trails anywhere. You had to create them as you went. Finally got a couple of jeeps and I found out where headquarters was. I got my wire people to lay wire to the batteries, to their locations. I finally got one 2 ½ ton truck and a 1 ton trailer. When we moved into my battery location I was the only guy who knew where it was so I drove the truck, and I must have had four tons on that thing. It was loaded down and guys hanging all over the top of it, and we drove back into the jungle to our place. We finally got it all done. It took several weeks to get into position. During that time, instead of normal attacking across a broad front... My wire lines went up the Matanikau to the regiments that fed off the end of it. While they were in their jumping off place we didn't have any radios that worked at all, so they were no use, so we depended entirely on laying field wire and doubling telephones and signal equipment. The telephones and switchboards were very good. They were useable the whole time and one of the things we had that worked. The trunk lines would go out at times, so the first of my knowledge I had a four-man wire team go up and reside with the infantry, and put in what we

called a forward switch so that if we lost one trunk line we had three that could be used in the other locations. That is something that wasn't in the book. I don't know whether anyone else ever did it before then or not. I'd never heard of it, but anyway it was a "horse sense" thing to do, so we did it. Later on we jumped off on the 10th of January to attack the Japanese and take over some hills. Now, we didn't have any maps of the area, and the way we designated places on a map, if we had a map, was from aerial photographs. The topography of the land was such that there were heavy trees in the valleys and the bottoms of the creeks. When I say valley, sometimes there were just two "V's" that came down and there was koony grass, tall grass, on the hill tops – the driest area. On an aerial photograph that showed as very light color and the trees showed as dark color. Those light colored areas were kind of like clouds. As kids you studied clouds and what they looked like and that kind of thing, well using the same technique, we had one little area of hills that was named the "Seahorse," and there was another group named the "Galloping Horse," and there was another long snakey one called the "Snake." Those were general designations that we used. With visual observation you throw a round of smoke out, and adjust it to one of those, and then you know where that is. If you want to know where the other end of that field was, you would drop another round of smoke. You know how much you've moved, etc. The very top little peaks of these little hills we numbered, so we had hill numbers and we would say, "Well, I'm at the neck of the 'Galloping Horse'."

So that is the kind of terminology that we used to describe and pass things back and forth – just made up. So on the 10th we jumped off. The Marines had told us that there was a place called the “Watering Hole” that was back alongside the “Gallop Horse” somewhere, and they thought that was a headquarters. I’m told for the first time in the Pacific we had sixty some odd guns, Howitzers, etc., had what we called “time on target.” In other words, the guns were different distances from that target, and so we got the best astronomical data we could, temperature, we had a weather balloon go up and check the cross-winds, etc. Each Battery adjusted their range based on the time of flight considering these atmospheric corrections that we hoped we read right and got right. At some time, 6:30 in the morning, or something like that, we had 65 guns drop rounds, theoretically timed to arrive all at the same time. How close it was, I don’t know. I wasn’t in a location where I could see it. That is a technique that is still used for big concentrations. I’m told that was the first time it was used in the Pacific. So we did that and the infantry jumped off and some achieved their objectives, some found them too strong and had to bypass and maneuver around, but we finally reached all objectives and then sat in a static position for some time. In the meantime, we still had problems with wire lines to some of these forward positions because you had to cross valleys to get there. Very honestly, whether it was the nervousness of our troops, or enemy activity, the infantry always told us it was enemy activity, I don’t know. I would have wire lines go out to these far

units and we would not have any radio working to back it up. Finally we had one line to the “Snake” for example, we had a battalion there, and that line would go out every night – early. So if they had a raid, etc., we had no communication with them. They had to have communication with us, so I took a wire team up there one day to recon the area and I went up the “Gallop Horse”, and up to the end of that where there was a big valley, and 200-300 yards over to the “Snake.” We could keep communications to the units that were on the “Horse,” but I couldn’t keep it to the “Snake” previously, so I decided to lay a lateral line over to them, and when that thing goes out maybe it can come around this way. My men didn’t have any what we called fatigue uniforms at the time – greens. They were in uniforms that were nearly as white as that shirt, CKC’s. I had three guys with me and that line needed to be laid, so I had on greens so I laid it. We never did have any more trouble with it. After the battle was on, I don’t think I deserved it, but anyway, they recommended me for a Silver Star for carrying that line over there. I would have ordered it done if the men were equipped, but they weren’t equipped to do it. I carried that thing across there by myself and set up, and then had them meet me back at where a trail came together and then we could go back home. So that worked. Those are the kinds of things we had to do to.

Mr. Smith: You mentioned the Marines. Where were they in relation to you?

Mr. Shields: The Marines had occupied and been in that position when we took over.

Their intelligence, and the best they knew, this was a “hot pocket.” In essence that is all they knew. There were a lot of folks in there. We ran into another area that was hotter than that, and we surrounded it. The 35th Infantry Regiment, which was one of our sister regiments. There were three regiments in the 25th Infantry Division, the 27th that I was part of a combat team of, the 35th, and the 161st. The 161st was a National Guard outfit. Anyway, the Geefu (?) Pocket and it took weeks. We surrounded it and we finally had to mop it out, but we didn’t just barge through it and take a lot of killing at the time.

Mr. Smith: How long did it take to secure the area?

Mr. Shiels: Well, it took several weeks. They finally got some small tanks in and I think they finally wiped it out with that, as I recall. That wasn’t directly under me; it was my observation. Then after a few weeks of static there we jumped off again and made a circuitous route and came back to the beach. The Marines that were there protected our right flank. There wasn’t anything to the left. That pretty well wiped out all of the resistance on Guadalcanal.

Mr. Smith: What was the time element again?

Mr. Shiels: That was in late January of 1943. Some of the big naval battles were going on at the times off that. Shortly after we finished and getting back to the sea on that round, the word was coming that there was a big Japanese attack coming down the slot – naval battles. They pulled us back to take positions behind the beach. In the case of outfit, my headquarters battery was assigned

a position that was just at the end of the fighter strip at Henderson Field. So we were in there and the Navy took care of that and the Japs never did get all the way to Guadalcanal on that trip.

Mr. Smith: Would your outfit have shot seaward then?

Mr. Shiels: Yes, we were where we could hit the beaches. A 105mm gun can only reach about 2 miles, and if you are set up a quarter mile or half mile behind the beaches, you can hit a landing force that is coming in. I was told that some of our units were set up on the beach for direct fire, and in that case . . . A field artillery unit, I think that is trained on indirect fire, doesn't know much about leading something when it is a moving target type of thing. It would have to be something coming straight at you almost, I think. We were just putting those guys in a position that they were never taught to handle. We were there for some time, and one of the memorable things about being there, it happened to be a time and while we were around that place, one of the amazing things to me is the fact that the scuttle bug came in one day. I think out enlisted men with the Air Force, and I don't remember how it got there, but the first thing I learned was that Yamamoto was coming into Bougainville and that we had broken the Japanese naval code and that we were sending P-38's up to get Yamamoto. My unit had a couple of SCR195's - that was the same radio transceiver that was used in the B-24's and B-17's, etc. - very good unit and could get the same frequency as the others, so the morning that was going on, those units were in a couple of command cars that I had and

everybody gathered around and listened. We heard the P-38's on station, heard them spot Yamamoto, heard them say "We got him." When they came back, of course, they buzzed the fighter strip and that was right over our heads so we saw the whole thing. We in the Army say that a guy who is not much good, we call a "yard bird." I'm sure that everybody down to the lowest "yard bird" knew that. A lot of them who had been in this malaria infected area – and we lost many more people to malaria than we did. . . at least we did in my area.

Mr. Smith: When you say "lost." You mean they were put out of commission, they weren't actually killed by the malaria.

Mr. Shiels: No, but they were sick. Malaria, if you've ever had it, is recurring. Once you get it you never get over it. It makes you weak, and you sweat at night, and sometimes you get the shakes. If you let it go too long, it can be dangerous, but generally when they would get a case of malaria they would send them back and maybe the Army would send them back to you, but the bad cases they sent back to the States, and then you would somebody else. Over a period of time I know that every enlisted man and officer there knew that the Japanese code had been broken. It was always amazing to me that the word never got back to the Japanese because this was in the Spring of '43, and I don't think they were ever aware of it as far as any history that I've read. So I've always thought that was a great tribute to the American soldier because I was sure that someone would get to bragging, etc. One of the interesting

things that happened about that time that was amazing to me is that personal hygiene was difficult because there were no good running streams back there and water was scarce, it was hot and steamy, so the best place to take a bath, if you got near the beach at all, was to go jump in the ocean, which we did frequently. The only trouble with that was that you were scratchy afterwards with salt. That presented another problem, but one time while we were behind Henderson Field I had been back to the supply depot or something, and my driver and I were a little ahead of schedule. We were stinky, so we said, "Let's pull off here and get a quick dip." The road was not over 50 yards from the beach. We ran over to the beach, stripped our clothes off and went in. Sometimes we would go in with our clothes on to wash them. I can't remember what we did this time, but as we came out I turned and here was a war canoe with headboard, it had about 16 paddlers, and they were all black, fuzzy headed, and they just had loin clothes on. They were bare to the front, and they were coming in. Ford Island is the Naval Base 22 miles north of Guadalcanal Beach, and they were coming in from that direction. The driver and I backed up to the edge of the palm trees and stood there. These guys were coming right for us, so we just stood and watched. When they hit the beach, they all jumped out and grabbed the canoe and brought it up above any tide level, and the one in front stopped no further than you are from me at the moment. I'm just standing there and the bow stopped up here, and they had taught us some, what they called "pigeon English," to talk to the natives.

Him fellow, you boy, or him boy, etc. So I said something like him boy you from Florida? Well this black, native, wild looking individual, answered me in the most perfect Oxford English you've ever heard. It made me feel about an inch tall. I was embarrassed. So, it turns out he was educated in England. Anyway, I went back to the tent and later sent a contribution to my church. As you would have it, our minister told us that my letter and check arrived the week before he was putting in a drive for funds for foreign missions, so the good Lord was taking care of us. Speaking of the good Lord taking care of me, after things were over I could name seven times that I moved from one location to another without any reason of fear or anything, and shortly thereafter, within hours, that spot would take a bomb or shell hit. So pretty soon you get to thinking that somebody is looking out after me. Anyway, we were in position there until the Jap situation, in other words the naval situation, was pretty well settled. Then our regimental partner was sent to Vella la Bella I think it was, taking over for Marines in setting up another air strip. There was a Jap air strip there. The Marine artillery that had been supporting the Marines before they left in place, I was told because there wasn't enough Naval transport to bring them out and bring us in, so they left us sitting on Guadalcanal. They went on up the slot there. In the meantime, my unit was put to work as stevedores unloading Navy ships, etc. Kind of got in trouble there – I noticed one day that some of my NCOs were volunteering for the work party. I asked the First Sergeant what in the hell

was going on. He said, "Well sir, they are unloading PX supplies down on the beach and occasionally a crate will get broken." It got to be pretty good duty. In my opinion, we couldn't buy any PX supplies from the Navy, so we were sitting there eating Army rations – canned cornbeef, etc. I think we had some native cattle on the island that the plantations had before, and when the Japs came in they just turned them loose. Some of them were still around. I had a couple of boys from Tennessee who knew how to butcher cattle, and also the CB's were working on the airfield. We were camped there for a while so I got buddy-buddy with them, and found that they had gotten a new refrigerator, so I asked what they did with their old one. They said, "It's over there." I asked, "Can I have it?" They said that I could have it, but the only thing wrong with it was the electric motor was burned out, and I didn't have a generator anyway. In the meantime, they had brought a hospital in that was camped several hundred yards near us and they had an electric generator, and we would run a line over from them to get a couple of lights and a radio working in our place. We brought this refrigerator over, and it was a walk-in deal. We had the compressor unit, etc., so we took a wrecked jeep and put the wrecked jeep motor on there and we had a cooler – thanks to the CB's. So then I would send my "Tennessee gang" out hunting, and they would butcher a cow. We had a Battalion Doctor with us, and he would have them bring the lungs, the liver, the vital parts and he would check for TB, etc. If it was all OK he would let them go ahead and cut it up. I had 278 officers and

men I was feeding and they could eat half to three-quarters of a beef a day, so we were getting fresh beef. In the meantime, we didn't have any of these other nice things. I'm ashamed to say that when I found out that some of the guys were sneaking some PX supplies, I said "Damn it fellows be careful." Well, one day about 10 o'clock I get a call from my Battalion Commander, and he says, "Bob you work detail got picked up by the MP's stealing PX supplies." I had some four-strippers in there. I thought "oh hell." I thought I would give them a quick Summary Court and they can't try a man twice. I had to take the stripes off of them. But, while I'm mulling that over, I'm sitting in the CP tent, and by this time we're in a formal type primal tent, streets, etc., the whole dressed up thing. I'm sitting there mulling this over when the old CQ (Charge of Quarters), a Corporal, Corporal Davis came in and says, "Sir, Private _____ requests permission to speak to the Battery Commander." I should have taken up on that because it is the first time that I know of that Private _____ had ever done anything correctly. That is the proper way to ask. He's the yardbird I was telling you about that the first time I ever heard of him, he told the First Sergeant when the First Sergeant asked his name, he says, "I'm Nick." The First Sergeant says, "What is your last name?" He says, "Oh, just call me Nick." He was the one I was telling you that ended up as permanent KP. He would work, he wasn't a gold brick, and I couldn't really say he didn't follow orders, but he would tweak them enough that it wasn't exactly what I wanted.

I couldn't trust him with anything. In fact, back in Honolulu, the first time I put him on guard duty, formal guard duty – you go in and we had a formal guard, live ammunition, etc. at the highschool. I get a call about 11 o'clock from a West Pointer, Major Spicer, who was the Officer of the Day. It seems that Major Spicer approaches this guard post and he is not challenged. You know formal guards are supposed to say, "Halt - advance to be recognized." So this guard is standing there and the Major approaches, and he doesn't say anything. Finally, the Major says, "Guard." He says, "Yes Sir." He said, "Why didn't you challenge me?" The answer Nick gave is, "Oh I don't have to challenge you Sir, I know you. You are one of the boys downstairs." I was on the carpet real fast! That was the first incident. Things like that happened with Nick all of the time. So, I said, "Show him in." I didn't pick up on this doing things right. Nick comes in, properly salutes, etc. He said, "Sir, I want to apologize." That got my attention. When a yardbird wants to apologize. I said, "Yes, Nick." Well, with the most disgust in his voice he could muster because you remember I told you that he ran a radio repair shop for the rackets in Chicago before the war? He said, "Sir, I want to apologize for not being on that labor detail today." Now he was the lowest guy in the place and the First Sergeant sets labor details, so for him to apologize – I didn't say anything. I listened to him. He says, "If I had been on that labor detail today, those fellows wouldn't have gotten caught." He further said, "If the Battery Commander will see that I'm on all future labor details I'll

guarantee that no one will ever get caught.” He was serious. So I said, “Well, thank you. I’ll think about that.” I let him go with that. I thought about it and then I went to the First Sergeant and told him about it. I said, “What do you think Sergeant?” He said, “Well, I think we had better put him on labor detail.” I said, “Well, I think so too.” So we put him on future labor details and he made good. No one was ever caught. I think they still ended up with a few pockets full of candy bars, etc. That is the kind of guy he was. So that was one of the outstanding events. There was more to come from that guy.

Mr. Smith: Back to your recollections – How long did it take to secure Guadalcanal?

Mr. Shiels: Well, the Navy history will tell you more. I was at a pretty low level down there in a Firing Battery and I didn’t have any contact with any of the upper levels, etc. I was busy taking care of 278 men – got movies for them every night, getting food, keeping equipment running, etc. I didn’t have time . . .

Mr. Smith: About how long was your outfit. . .

Mr. Shiels: In general, the last big air raid that we had from them I believe was in the middle of April. I believe about April 17th.

Mr. Smith: Then from January to April?

Mr. Shiels: Yes, they still had potential up there. The Navy really took care of that. When they bottled up Truck and bypassed Truck, we didn’t have any more trouble. The last big air raid was in April. The Lunga River, one of the major river functions that comes in in the middle of all of this area, and I had my

units down in the Lunga River area and we were practicing crossing streams with jeeps and three-quarter tons, and with 2 ½ tons. If we had a river that was too deep, then we were using water pump grease to cover up and to make water-tight things to take the intakes for your carburetors up above water and the exhausts out, and to stop up all breathers, etc. for the engine, and just drive under water and back up again. So we were practicing that and we were also driving a jeep into a big tarp and folding it up and tying it up and making a float out of it, and floating it across. We were experimenting when this air raid comes along. We were down, just inside the beach where we could see it. Suddenly, planes are going all over. We just stopped and watched because we knew they weren't after just one guy. One thing I remember very strongly is one Japanese bi-plane with open cockpit, came in not over a hundred feet or so high from where we were, and did a turn, and then hit the ground maybe a quarter mile away, or less. It cartwheeled. That was their last big push. Some where in there we started up the slot retaking their airfields, etc. We had to sit out part of that activity and fight the battle on the beach for a while. In November they loaded us up and sent us down to New Zealand for three months R&R. That was a delightful place. Then they brought us back to New Caledonia to pick up recruits and train. We were camped maybe 20 miles north of Numeia.

Mr. Smith: Before you go on with that, please tell us a little about New Zealand – the people, the treatment.

Mr. Shiels: The people were great. The city of Auckland, as I was told, was about 35,000 people. We had lost a lot of people. Our T.O. was 25,000 - 26,000 and we may have had 20,000. We couldn't let them all go to town at once because there wasn't room for them. We let them take a pass once a week. That filled up the town for that matter, but in the meantime, my unit, my battery, was camped at a little milk town center called Madacanna, about 60 miles north of Auckland, out in the sticks. It was just a dairy community. We were put in a former camp that the New Zealand Army had. They had little wooden shacks that you could put eight people in. There were little, wooden, and off the ground about a foot and a half. They had a pitched roof and you could let boards down and screens so you could get away from the bugs. I think they had four officers in one of those, and you could put eight men in one – something like that. They were permanent, and there was a little headquarters spot, etc. I seem to recall that the local women came in and had tea, cookies, etc. for us. They had "English" type of goodies. They were delightful people. After being there a little while, we knew that the New Zealand boys of our age were all in Africa at that time, so we learned that some of the local farmers would take one or two boys and be responsible for them. They would come and get them in the morning. If the guys wanted to work and keep their nose clean, the farmer would take them and feed them during the day, work them, and then bring them back. The amazing thing to the farmers was that we had boys that knew how to run a tractor, knew how

to milk a cow, and how to do some of these things. What the New Zealanders knew, to my amazement at the time, of impression of American men was that we were like the movies they saw – the gangsters, that we all spent nights in nightclubs, in tuxedos, dancing, or driving around in cars with machine guns, etc. They were amazed that we were just common folks like they were. The guys enjoyed doing that a lot. They fit in and did a great job. In the meantime, my brother was in the same outfit, and he was on the advance party and had come into Auckland with the division to help set that up, and already knew some people. When I arrived in town, a couple of weeks later, the mother of the girl he happened to be dating, found out I was in town and asked Gene to ask me to dinner that night. This guy was an attorney and he had a house near downtown Auckland. A big 2-story house, tennis court next door, etc. So I arrived, greeted, and after a nice visit we go to the dining room and gee, this lady must have spent all the rations she had (I found out later) to buy a roast beef for my benefit and all of the vegetables that went with it, pie for desert. So after a sumptuous meal we retired to the living room, and again to my amazement, the hostess comes in and says, “Well, Bob I must apologize for not having a night club for you boys to go to.” I told her that was the last place I would want to go, that I hadn’t been in a home in over a year so doing just what we were doing was the best thing I could do. It was amazing to find how much our movies told foreigners of ourselves. It makes me wonder today what kind of junk we are putting out

and the impression they have. It must be horrible. My brother and I got a ten-day special duty while things settled down. We just did nothing for the first month down there. Since I had been working for General Electric Company, they had an agent in town. I met him; a fellow by the name of Bob Plaus (?). They were delightful. They took Gene and me fishing some. We found out they were going on holiday. They don't take vacations – they go on “holiday.” So they were going on holiday down in the center part of North Island trout fishing. We managed this TDY (temporary duty) to correspond with that. We bought, with a contract to sell back, a little Austin, 2-seater, mini automobile. It had an engine about the size of a shoe box. It had a luggage rack on the back. Three of us loaded that thing up. We could get all the gas we needed from the Army, so we had four 5-gallon cans on the luggage rack in the back. This thing used a quart of oil about every 60 miles. It was a smoker. Oil wasn't rationed, so that wasn't a problem. We used 60 weight oil. We took it down and the center of North Island they have mud pots, similar to what we have in Yellowstone. The first day we went in there and decided we would do what sightseers did, so we took a combination bus/boat tour up in the mountains and across what they called the Blue Lake on a little steam launch, then another bus to the Green Lake, and another little steam launch. These were old steam launches were the 1915 version, actually run with little steam engines, etc. They were quiet. Then we took a bus back to town. That was interesting. In walking down the street, one thing – my

name is spelled without a "d". My Grandfather Shiels came over here in 1870 from Scotland, an area of southern Scotland, and to the best of my knowledge at that time there were just his family, my Grandfather and his half-brother's family were all that I knew that it was spelled that way. So we are walking down the street and here is a jewelry store, James A. Shiels, which was my Grandfather's name, spelled without a "d". So we can't help but walk in, thinking he would be pleased to see us, and not thinking of what we looked like coming in. Well, we got a cold reception because in retrospect, here is a jewelry store, and here are a couple of Yanks coming in delighted and saying we're your cousins. He was as suspicious as heck. We recognized that immediately and excused ourselves and departed. We should have planned that better. Then we went on down to a lodge that our friends from GE were staying at. We got there and they were already out fishing, so we got out and I ended up, just in the afternoon, getting a 21 ½ - 22 inch rainbow, which to me I was accustomed to the fish we caught up in Colorado, which were about six or seven inches long. This one was about 22 inches long and I thought I had died and gone to heaven. They said that was their standard – their normal fish down there. We had a great time fishing the next day and then Gene and Jerry Grimes got a wire to return to headquarters because we were getting ready to leave. They didn't tell me to come back, so I put them on the train and I went on down and had another few days. That was an interesting experience and the people were wonderful. I went on down to Lake Talpo,

which is a big lake similar to Yellowstone Lake. It had a fast river coming into it. I didn't get down there until close to noon. I got a quick bite of lunch and then asked the proprietor of the motel I was staying at where to fish. He said to go down to the mouth of the river, where it empties in, so I drove down there. There were eight or ten families of Aborigines, the Mauries. The cars were parked and the men in deep waders, and they had two-fisted fly rods and they were out in this fast stream. I had an eight pound little light fly rod and light equipment, and I didn't have any waders. I had shorts on and a pair of my combat boots, so I was wading out in that icy water that way. Long story short – they were letting their flies stream way out in this thing and then with these big two-fisted fly rods when one would get a fish on then everybody else got their lines in. I didn't see a fish caught less than five pounds. I would get a strike, but I had such light equipment, and that fast water, that it was hard to strike and my pole was too limber get the strike way out there to the end. Finally I got hold of one. They said it was the biggest fish they had caught that day. They were being polite to the "Yank." I would be out there fishing for about twenty minutes and one of them would say, "Would you go up to the car and tell my wife to fix you some tea." I must have been turning blue. So I would go up to the car and the wife and the children had a little gasoline stove they had fired up and they would give me some tea and crumpets, etc. They were just delightful people. The city of Auckland was great. You could get a milkshake. We hadn't had a milkshake

in years. So there was plenty of fresh food. Then we were taken up to New Caledonia for replacements and new equipment, etc. getting ready to stage to go on up in the islands. We camped about 60 miles north of Numeia. We finally drew some new radio equipment that we were supposed to have.

Mr. Smith: That would work?

Mr. Shiels: That was frequently modulated. I remember the light units, I think were called SCR510's. I forget what the larger units that were a little more powerful. This stuff was supposed to work five miles in clear areas. We couldn't get it to work over about a mile and a half. I went up to Division Signal Office and they didn't know about it— how to handle it, so they sent me to Corp. They couldn't do anything with it, so finally I remembered this gangster who had operated a radio that you couldn't get anything out of, and incidentally part of the time we were at New Caledonia, he ended up being KP permanently and Officers' Mess. He would stay up at night and with an AM radio you could get the news from the States, etc. Nick would memorize the German and the Russian – Germany was attacking Russia at this time, so at breakfast the next morning he would tell us the news – where the German line was now and what was happening in Europe. He had a photographic memory. After trying all the help I could get and the radios wouldn't work, one day I stayed home from drill, had a table put up by my tent, and I had the radio chief bring me one of these radios and a test set, and the manual to align it. I had Nick come up. I said, "Nick, you and I are going to see if we can

find what is wrong with this radio today.” I was an electrical engineer, but this was long before chips, etc. that we have today. I knew vacuum tube theory, but I didn’t know much about radios. I said, “Let’s start in the RF end of this thing and follow the tuning and you tell me as we get to each stage everything that you remember from the book about that, and we will go through the retuning from RF through the intermediate stages, etc. to the output.” We did. We sat down and I would say, “OK, this first RF amplification states that the book said do so and so.” You would look at the diagram and this set of condensers and stuff that you did something with, and Nick would tell me what the book said, and then if that made sense to me, from a “horse sense” point of view, I would say, “OK, next one.” We got in the middle of the IF somewhere down there, and what Nick told me and what the instruction manual said didn’t quite make sense. So I said, “Well, Nick let’s do it the reverse.” Instead of turning that capacitor or resistor up, let’s turn it down. He turned it just the other way and we went on through and the thing worked. It was just a misprint in the instructions. So then I took that knowledge up to the Division Signal and they went to Corp, so we got all of the radios working, but it was Nick’s brains that did it. He was really a character. For example, one time, I believe it was while we were in New Caledonia, I was late to breakfast for some reason. I don’t recall now. But for some reason I had had the duty and I ate after the other officers did, so it was just Nick and me at the Officer’s Mess. He was telling me what he had

heard on the news that day, and then he very confidentially said, "Sir, I got a package from Mother today. She sent me a lot of garlic." He said, "You know, I never have taken any Atabrine, I've just been eating garlic." The First Sergeant was supposed to line everybody up every day and toss Atabrine in their mouth. They were supposed to open their mouth and then drink water. With Nick being off on KP he missed it and he was the healthiest guy in the outfit. He looked like a Greek God – his physique, muscle tone, and, of course, he was working like a horse. I didn't rat on him if that garlic was working on him that long without malaria. When it isn't broken – don't fix it! I thanked him profusely. That is how sincere he was. Later in the Phillipines, my Battery was beside the road, south of San Jose, which was the last town before you went up the Bilati (?) Pass, and we had chased the Japs where they were manning the Pass and had the very north end of the island. We weren't trying to cost any men to take it because they couldn't do anything but sit there and rot anyway, so we were just maintaining pressure. Anyway, I'm going up to check on something one day and have a little time. Here is 8th Field Artillery Battalion and I'm going right by the Headquarters tent. It is 10 o'clock in the morning, so I know that the Battery Commander is off doing their thing. I turn in and there is the cook and Nick. Nick is glad to see me. He was doing Officer's Mess KP. He says, "Sir, if the Major stay for dinner tonight I'll get a Filipino Band." The Battery Commander is supposed to invite me to dinner if I'm coming to dinner, not the lowest yard

bird in the place. If I'd come I'm sure he would have had a Filipino Band there. What a character. Back to New Caledonia. Well, we got the radios fixed, and incidentally, an interesting thing while we were there, about that time, it was time for the Feast of the Passover. We had some Jews in our group. I was still down at the Battery as I recall, and we had a Protestant Chaplain with the Division and we had a Catholic Chaplain with the Division, but we didn't have a Rabbi. They told us there wasn't a Rabbi in the area, so I had gotten to know our Protestant Chaplain quite well. I knew the Catholic one too, but didn't have as much in common as I did with the Protestant one, Evans T. Mosley by name. He was a Baptist Minister from Evansville, Indiana, and he had a voice to do that job. He had been holding services for us and that is where I had met him. He passed the word that he was going to hold a Feast of the Passover for all the Jewish faith that wanted to go in the Division. I had three or four guys, so they joined the party. Evans T. Took a detail of cook and some tents, etc., and they went up in the mountains. New Caledonia has jungle up high. It is kind of grassland down on the beaches, but you can go five miles inland and you can be in heavy jungle. So, anyway, he took them up there and they spent the whole time. My guys told me when they came back that was the best Feast of the Passover they had ever been in. Of course, those Protestant Chaplains, and I think the Catholics too, were trained to do all kinds of services. Evans was a personal friend of mine by that time, and I thought that was a great tribute to him, and also to his

profession because they were very impressed that this Baptist could give them their hole pitch, and only their pitch, and none of his – nothing about Christ. They were really impressed. That was really heartening to get involved with. About that time we got these new radios and the Division had us put on a show for all the officers as to what these could do, so we set up a little dog and pony show, and I had the artillery side of it, to physically set up radio teams like OP's in front and you got back to Battery, back to Battalion, Battalion to Regiment, etc. We paraded these guys through and we would stop and show people what they were with signs, and then pass on. Then they had sort of a conference on that and then asked for questions afterwards, and I, not knowing any better, had some ideas, so when things settled down I got up and made some suggestions and pointed out that was all very well and good for attacking in Europe and over normal farmland, and that kind of thing, but the kind of conditions we had been in so far you had to improvise. I suggested that everybody keep an open mind and use the tools you had, etc. A couple of days after that I get a call from General Bloodso, Commanding the Division Artillery, to come and see him. So I reported in, and he said, "Shiels, I need someone up here that can look after communications for my artillery, and I want you to come up to Headquarters as Assistant Division Signal Officer. There is a Majority in it for you, and you help see that Artillery is taken care of in coordination with the Infantry." I accepted. On New Caledonia I was transferred up to Division Headquarters then and

changed to Signal Corps. This happened in New Caledonia. We had gotten new replacements, and we had gotten this new equipment, and we pretty well got our Table of Organization stuff for the first time – vehicles, equipment, etc. that didn't exist before in our place. Anyway, I got involved in the Signal deal then and we were assigned some liaison planes, which were attached to our Signal Company, and then in training with them, we got radios. You need to communicate by radio to the observer, and then you also needed, if radio was out (end of tape).

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