

## Leonard Kovar Oral History Interview

PETER RIESZ: Today is the 20th of October, year 2000. It's about 10 after 9:00. We're interviewing at Mr. Kovar's business place. Leonard Kovar, born in Victoria, Texas. I'm Peter Riesz, interviewing for the MOWW. What's your complete name, for a start-off here, Leonard?

LEONARD KOVAR: Leonard J. Kovar. The name is actually Joe, J-O-E, the middle name. Leonard Joe, not Joseph.

PR: Just the short Joe.

LK: Yeah.

PR: When were you born?

LK: Nineteen twenty-one. November the fourth, 1921, toward Six Mile, Texas, which is just up the road by Port Lavaca.

PR: Six Mile Community. Was there a little community there at that time?

LK: Yes. Dance hall, a little grocery store... Some stuff there.

PR: Lot of cotton farming at that time?

LK: Yes. It's good black land, good farming land.

PR: What I'd hope to do here today is just interview you mainly about your military career: how you got in the service, where you trained, and where you went to. I want to document it as accurately as we can. Any unusual

experiences you had, I'd like you to throw in, too. Any feelings you had as you went through your time in the service, or any funny stories, humorous things. Even sad things, I suppose. Just to get a feel for where you went, how you went, and what your feelings were at the time. Where did you have your elementary school, for a start?

LK: I enlisted here in Victoria. But it shows as being inducted in San Antonio.

PR: How about your schooling, though? Did you go to elementary school down there?

LK: No, we moved. My father was a sharecropper. We moved from there to Victoria when I was four years old. And then I went to school at a little school named Lone Tree. It's outside of Victoria. It's about six or eight miles.

PR: One-room schoolhouse?

LK: That's right. Two teachers. They had a division thing they could slide in, separation.

PR: Where was that near?

LK: Up from Guadalupe.

PR: Was that a county school?

LK: Yes, regular school.

PR: And you finished all your elementary there?

LK: Finished there, yes.

PR: And then high school?

LK: Came to high school in Victoria, Patti Welder.

PR: When'd you graduate there? What year?

LK: Nineteen thirty-nine.

PR: What'd you do after you graduate?

LK: Everything and anything I could find to do. (laughter) Let me say that at this time this was just end of the Depression. Still hanging pretty tough. It was with us until the war. I worked helping to put in this (inaudible) electrification lines that they put in, digging holes and setting those big old posts. I worked at that and never run out of -- I always had a job of some kind. (laughter) But I had many jobs. I had no training, really.

PR: Times were still pretty hard then.

LK: They were tough.

PR: Jobs just weren't a dime a dozen.

LK: No.

PR: And pay wasn't \$7.00 an hour. I'm sure of that.

LK: I did a little of everything, from making hamburgers at a hamburger stand in Houston and selling Bama pies.

PR: How did you get related to the military, then?

LK: Just before I went in, they had built Foster Field out here where the airport is. And then they were building [Allo?] Field, the bomber base. And I was a carpenter apprentice on that. I got there and got a little better job.

(laughs) Those people wanted to send me. That was in the first part of '42. We'd had Pearl Harbor in December. And they started rebuilding Pearl Harbor. And the superintendent there liked me pretty good. And they wanted to defer me from the draft and send me to Pearl Harbor to help rebuild. I wouldn't. I just didn't want any part of that. He tried every way to talk me into it. He said, "Don't be foolish. You'll make some money." "No, I want to go fight the Japs, those dirty birds." (laughter)

PR: Had you registered for the draft already?

LK: Oh, yes. And there was three other guys working on the same job. We all enlisted together.

PR: When did you enlist?

LK: I think they show October the 18th of '42, 18th or 19th. Something like that. Went to boot camp from there, to the Recruit Depot in San Diego, California.

PR: Did you go from here to San Antonio?

LK: Yeah, it was just a stopover on the way.

PR: Where did you actually sign up with the Marines? Here locally in Victoria?

LK: Well, we thought we did. But they pointed us to the day to be inducted. And that was in San Antonio. That actually shows on my discharge as entrance, at San Antonio.

PR: Did you have your physical up there?

LK: Yes.

PR: You passed that all right?

LK: Yeah.

PR: Then they sent you right onto San Diego.

LK: Yes.

PR: By troop train?

LK: Yes, by troop train. That's quite an experience, too, being inducted into the Marine Corps. They're pretty tough. They get you in there. Country boy. Start hollering at you and so on. They used to do things that I caught onto pretty quick. (laughter) We walked in there. And the first day or night we all got into barracks. We're going to have roll call. And we hadn't eaten on that train in about a day. So they were going to get us ready to go to chow. And some Sergeant there had a radio playing in the background. They had us lined up around the place. Some wise little guy from Louisiana said, "Hey, turn up that radio so we can hear it, too." And the Sergeant exploded and used some real strong words, language. (laughter) And he says, "Who said that?" No one said anything. He said, "Okay, you damn bird heads," or whatever. "Everybody at attention. Now everybody will stand there until whoever the wise SOB was admits to it." (laughter) And finally, this little guy finally admitted

it. And I had never seen such a chewing. It really tore him up.

PR: That's the Drill Sergeant?

LK: Yeah. And then they took us and started us in our training.

PR: Was that troop training from here? No place to sleep? Just went straight through to San Diego?

LK: Yeah.

PR: Not a sleeping care or anything like that?

LK: No, you slept when you were sitting up or whatever.

PR: Which camp was this?

LK: Camp San Diego Recruit Depot, where we went for seven weeks of training, indoctrination, and beating the hell out of you. (laughs)

PR: Did you get your uniforms as soon as you got there? They try to line you up and teach you how to march and all those things?

LK: That brings on a good story. (laughs) The first thing they done the next morning was took us to the barber shop. And everybody got a skinned head. The big Colonel came up there and talked to us. He says, "We want to really make you an organization," and all this that and the other. "We want to treat everybody the same. So we cut everybody's the hair the same so we can't tell you apart." (laughter)

And then the thing I'll never forget as long as I live -- I was talking to somebody the other day about it -- the day after that, they decided to issue us rifles. They issued us the new M-1 rifle. But it was covered with Cosmoline and all of that. I knew it was a Saturday morning, but we got those things out there at the wash rack and so on. We got to cleaning them up. We got them all cleaned up, shined up. Then these two Drill Instructors that were assigned to our platoon to make Marines out of us, they said, "Now everybody line up. We're going to show you how to hold that rifle." Showed us what Port Arms was, holding it right out in front of you. And then went up and down the line, 70 of us, adjusting. They made us stand at attention, holding that rifle at Port Arms all the time. And I'm normally pretty mild-mannered. (laughter) And I held onto it. But I swore to myself that someday I would have a cartridge for that M-1 and I was going to shoot that SOB. (laughter) Course, you go through it, you live through it. Oh, and they done that after they gave us all our shots. We got our shots first.

PR: Your arm's all aching?

LK: (laughter) Aching. We got all our shots and then went to the rifle bit. And they start teaching you which is your left foot. You start everything.

PR: You're a dummy. Don't know a thing. They're going to teach you everything about life.

LK: (laughs) Yeah, your other left.

PR: That was a seven-week basic boot camp; they call it in the Marines.

LK: Uh-huh.

PR: Were you living in barracks on the base there?

LK: Tents. We had tents that were pretty decent. I learned later that was a hell of a good deal, the tents, (laughter) after we went overseas.

PR: Better than a foxhole; that's for sure. Did you have a pretty good meal? They had good chow for you?

LK: Fed you beautifully.

PR: How did they start out after you learned your left and right foot and how to hold a gun? They show you how to take care of your uniform and your billets?

LK: Yeah, you had to be ready for inspection. Some things that happened to some of the guys... And you washed your clothes every day. What clothes you wore, you washed every day. Had the old benches. And you had a scrub brush. And the benches, the water piped to them. Everybody washed the underwear that they wore. And if there's time to wash enough else, you washed them every day. These Sergeants could really be something, these DIs. They would inspect



your washing. They'd stand at that gate. And when you got through the washing, they'd inspect your washing.

(laughter) And this guy came up and was coming through the gate with his clothes in his bucket. And the Sergeant says, "Are those clothes clean?" "Yes, sir." "Are you real sure they're clean?" "Yes, sir." "Well, let me see them." He picked them up, and they had maybe a hash mark or two in them (laughter) where he hadn't cleaned them, maybe stained or whatever. He said, "Stand attention. Now see if you can chew on that." (laughter)

PR: Next time around they were spotless-clean. Did they take you out into the field? Close Combat courses and things like that? Trenches and foxholes?

LK: Yeah, and crawling under barbed wire with machineguns firing over you, and bayonet practice.

PR: How many men were there, total, at the camp?

LK: At one time there was 70 to a platoon and about 10 platoons. I guess about 700 or so in the training.

PR: And you were all moving through together.

LK: Yeah.

PR: Were you assigned to a unit at all at that time, or were you just a trainee?

LK: Platoon 970.

PR: That was your training platoon.

LK: Yeah. And my dog tag was 448808.

PR: Oh, yeah. I meant to ask you that. What was your dog?

LK: 488808.

PR: You don't forget that number, do you?

LK: No, no.

PR: Lot of physical conditioning? Calisthenics? Marches?

LK: Oh, yes. And the food, let me say, that was really good.

You got there and when you'd walk in and sit down on the big benches, they'd have food out there and big gallon-pitchers of milk. When you come out of that six weeks, seven weeks, you're in good shape.

PR: Were the Drill Instructors intentionally mean, or were they fair-minded in general?

LK: They were fair. They were kind of comical in a way unto themselves, I guess to keep them going. I got a picture over here of a nephew of mine that was a Drill Instructor for a while here in the last 10, 15 years.

PR: Anything they found, I get the idea they tend to overplay it, make a big show out of it.

LK: We had of course your platoon ranked with height, trying to line them up. We would march in the same order every day. But I had a big old guy by the name of Redford. And he was like a big kid, from Dallas, Texas. And he couldn't march. He had a hard time. I marched in back of him. This

Sergeant would chew on old Rich. And finally he'd say, "Kovar, kick him." I'd go on. "Kovar, kick him." I'd go on. He trotted upside of me real close to get to my ear. And he said, "Kovar, do you hear me? You kick him or I'll show you what some real kicking is." And I was scared. So I kicked old Redford. I don't think he ever learned to march. (laughter)

PR: Did you march everywhere you went?

LK: Oh, yes.

PR: Were you always in companies?

LK: For that seven weeks, we didn't go anyplace that we were by ourselves without being in the group. It was on our way from the mess hall, back to the tent area. When you finished your meal, you go on back. And you get your butt on over there, too.

PR: What happened at the end of the seven-week boot training? Did you get rank at that time?

LK: They took a bunch of us out of my platoon and sent us to Santa Ana, California, as guards of a Naval Lighter than Air Base, these things that patrolled the coast for subs and that. They had just put a new one in Santa Ana. They grabbed a bunch of us from that bunch and sent us. We stayed there about six months, in the meantime doing that job and still training.

PR: You still had training also?

LK: Yeah. We'd have an eight-hour Guard shift. And other than that, you'd have a four-hour training area or something, getting you ready.

PR: Was it mostly classwork, or was it in different weapons? Handling weapons?

LK: Weapons and conditioning and jiu-jitsu and all that stuff.

PR: This was sort of advanced basic training, then.

LK: Yeah. Everybody in the Marine Corps has got to march, except for Redford (laughter). Has to know the basic military things and do well in it.

PR: They really stress physical conditioning all the time?

LK: Yeah. They had a drill they called Grass Drill. It got us outside the barracks early in the morning. We'd do pushups and (laughter) kick-ups and everything else. It was side-straddle hops and whatever. They claimed they could use you for 30 minutes a day in that, and that'll keep you in great condition.

PR: Was Guard Duty an eight-hour shift? Would you actually walk the fences?

LK: Well, I drew a good number there. We had a jeep patrol that went all the way around this 100 acres or so. We had a jeep patrolling all the time. I drew one of those spots.

PR: The riding patrol.

LK: But most of them were walking around the barracks and around the Lighter than Aircraft.

PR: Did they have big hangars at that time?

LK: They had a few. I think we had two hangars there. But most of that stuff never went in the hangar. It was anchored out on the grounds.

PR: They call them dirigibles?

LK: Yeah.

PR: Did they go out off the coast all the time doing sub patrol?

LK: Yes, they'd go up and down that patrol. We had Jap subs pretty close in.

PR: Did you ever hear any talk about them seeing the subs?

LK: No.

PR: There's a rumor about how the subs fired on San Diego one time.

LK: I don't know if they did or not. It could have.

PR: Something blew up and they blamed it on the subs, I think, from what it sounds like. What did you do after that six months?

LK: Then I went back to San Diego, to Camp Elliot. This was intense. You're getting ready to go over and catch it.

PR: Were you assigned to a unit at that time?

LK: Stayed there and trained a while. Then we were assigned to go and replace the Guadalcanal guys that didn't make it. They had gone in there a year before. They were rebuilding the 1st Marine Division. That's how I got in the 1st Division.

PR: So you were replacements.

LK: Yes.

PR: How long did you stay at Elliot?

LK: I think it's about maybe two months, if that long.

PR: That was really intense training?

LK: Yeah, crawled on my belly all over those hills out there in the desert and stuff.

PR: Working with your rifle? How to take that rifle apart and put it back together?

LK: Uh-huh. Machineguns, light machineguns.

PR: Mortars?

LK: Mortars. I went to Demolition School, was one of those chosen to get on that and talk about the dynamite and flamethrowers and stuff like that.

PR: So you really had broad training.

LK: I really did. I got into a lot of different areas of it.

PR: Jumped from one area to another and fell in or whatever. Where did you go at the end of Elliot? Were you assigned to the 1st Marine?

LK: Yeah. We had a little trip to make on the USS [*Mormack Hawk?*]. That was a Liberty ship they were using to transport us.

PR: Where did that leave from?

LK: That left from San Diego.

PR: USS what, was it?

LK: *Mormack Hawk*. M-O-R-M-A-C-K, I think. Hawk. *Mormack Hawk*.

PR: That's a strange name. I don't know how they named those ships.

LK: That ought to get you with your birds (laughter)  
(inaudible).

PR: How many would you say were on that ship? Were they all replacement Marines, do you think?

LK: Yeah. This was in the thousands.

PR: Packed in pretty tight?

LK: Yes. Of course, we weren't on that thing but about six days. We went to Nouméa, New Caledonia.

PR: When did you leave San Diego? Do you know what the date was? Is that on the papers?

LK: The date was likely November, middle of November.

PR: (off-topic dialogue; not transcribed) You sailed out across the Pacific. Were you in a convoy?

LK: No, we were zigzagging. Some of those unprotected. They just turn you loose out there. And you zigzag, dodging them subs.

PR: On your own six days. Were you down in the bowels of the ship?

LK: No, it was too darn hot down there. We tried to get on deck. If you could, we'd get a group together and we'd get under the shade of the lifeboats hanging up on the side. That'd shade the sun off you, and we could get together and play Pinochle. And we'd play Pinochle from daylight till dark.

PR: Just passing the time of day. Did you have regular three meals a day, or two meals a day?

LK: We got only two meals. That's normally what they give us on those.

PR: Was it a fairly smooth trip going across? No big storms?

LK: Yeah, the whole Pacific is pretty quiet mostly.

PR: No typhoon or something. (laughter) In six days you made it to New Caledonia; that must've been a pretty fast ship, as ships go. That's a long way.

LK: I guess it's French, wasn't it? French people had those islands. Early on, before Guadalcanal, I think maybe the Japs decided they couldn't hold New Caledonia. So they gave it up.



PR: Where did you land in New Caledonia? Was there a port?

LK: Yes, there was a port there. We stayed there two days.

PR: Remember the name of the port? That's a pretty big island, isn't it, New Caledonia?

LK: Yeah. Nouméa is the best town I saw overseas. Course, I was in the jungle most of the time.

PR: Nouméa on Caledonia?

LK: Yeah. You could get a rum and coke all day. (laughter)

PR: So they unloaded you there and were getting you processed in.

LK: Processing us. From there we left and went to first a little place called Good Enough Island. That was real close to New Guinea.

PR: You got there by Liberty ship also?

LK: Yeah. It was a day and a half or something like that through there.

PR: Were you assigned in the 1st Division yet?

LK: From Good Enough Island, we were sent to New Guinea. And that's where the 1st Division was gathering again. They put us all together there.

PR: Where in New Guinea was that?

LK: Melanie Bay.

PR: That's where the 1st Division had come back to?

LK: Yes.

PR: Was Guadalcanal all over at that time?

LK: Yes. And they had been to Australia, recuperating, the survivors. We joined them and stayed there and done a little more training. We were going to land, which we did, in about less than two weeks.

PR: Did you know that?

LK: No, we didn't know. (laughter) We're out there. They sent some of us to this company and some to that, filling in the holes.

PR: Tell me what your Chain of Command was. It was the 1st Marine Division. Was there a regiment?

LK: Yes, there were four regiments, counting the weapons and that. And three battalions to a regiment. And four companies to a battalion. Then you went right on down to your guy on the line there, the Rifleman and the Squad Leader.

PR: What regiment were you in?

LK: I was in the 7th, L37: L Company, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine.

PR: L Company, 3rd Battalion...

LK: And 7th Regiment.

PR: That's your whole Chain of Command.

LK: Uh-huh.

PR: Did you stay in that company pretty much all the way through?

LK: Yeah, I stayed in it till I was hit.

PR: How many men in your company?

LK: Two hundred and thirty, forty. Something like that.

PR: Was this an Infantry Company? Rifle Company?

LK: Yes, we were a Rifle Company.

PR: Did you have any heavy mortars or weapons at all?

LK: Yeah, we did. (off-topic dialogue; not transcribed). I was a bazooka man.

PR: I didn't know they had bazookas that early.

LK: It was the old-timey ones.

PR: Held that on your shoulder?

LK: Yeah.

PR: What would you do? Load the --

LK: Those were all two-men operations. This guy here was my buddy. He's shooting it, and I'm back here. I'm loading it. I put the shell in and then hook it up. Those batteries are charged, set it off. Then I hook it up and I slap him on the shoulder and it's all his.

PR: Then then he would pull the trigger. That would shoot it off electronically like a rocket going off.

LK: Yeah.

PR: So you didn't want to stand behind that, did you? Did that make a big blast behind you?

LK: Yeah.

PR: You had to be careful of that. (laughs)

LK: I was wounded. I was loading him up when we got wounded. He struck and hit one machinegun nest and knocked it out. We were ready to load up and try to get another one. And we got hit. But talk about that blast... I was right back here, and he was up here. And when he pulled that trigger on that second one, about that time this machinegun blast hit us, Jap machinegun. Well, it hit me. It spun me around. I was sitting with my hands in my lap, just kind of busy. It hit me in my left shoulder and just turned me around. I said, "Oh my God, they've tore off my arm." And I looked down into my lap, and sure enough there was my hand. So I grabbed hold of my hand and traced it all the way up to the shoulder and said, "Shoot, it's there."

(laughter)

PR: After Melanie Bay, you continued your training there?

LK: Not very much. We made some landings, some mock landings.

PR: Did you practice going out on ships and going down into the LCVPs and then up to the beach?

LK: Yeah. Some of that water there in that area, I don't know why, but it's so rough. A lot of the guys get sick on

these landing boats, which is a horrible thing (laughs)  
when they're taking the boat full of men and then a couple  
of them get sick.

PR: Is that where you had the Higgins boats?

LK: Yeah.

PR: Just like the Normandy people did.

LK: Uh-huh.

PR: You'd load a whole company?

LK: No, probably a platoon.

PR: Thirty-five or so?

LK: Yeah.

PR: How long were you at Melanie Bay, and where'd you go after  
that?

LK: We stayed there less than two weeks. From there we loaded  
aboard a converted destroyer. I don't know what that  
meant. But they used those for the landings. They'd put  
us all on that destroyer thing and head in close enough  
where then you're loaded onto your Higgins boats, out a  
mile or so from the beach.

PR: That's down the side? You'd climb down?

LK: Yeah, climb down with a pack on your back and your rifle  
slung over your shoulder.

PR: What'd you have in your pack?

LK: You started out with a lot of things. (laughter) Gas masks and all kinds of stuff. We were rid of those things by the second day. We didn't have any of it left. They could load you pretty good.

PR: Would you have any personal belongings in a duffle bag somewhere?

LK: We left those at Good Enough Island.

PR: You ever see them again? (laughter)

LK: In 1955 or '56 at my home where I was living after I came home and married. Was here in Victoria. And my sea bag came to my house, shipped to my house. And listen to this: the only thing it had in it was a picture of a girl. (laughter) My wife said, "Who is this?" And of course I said, "Babe, that's 100 years ago." But how that traced that sea bag to my house... I should have saved it.

PR: In your sea bag you had your personal stuff?

LK: Personal stuff. But that's the last I saw of it.

PR: Was there an occasion where you'd be able to catch up with that, get things out, and put other things in? Was that the original intention?

LK: I guess, after the skirmish or we secured that Cape Gloucester deal, there.

PR: Otherwise you just had your field pack on your back.

LK: Yeah.

PR: Did you have a [wet?] belt you carried with ammunition or a canteen?

LK: Yeah, a canteen.

PR: First aid kit or something?

LK: That's what was really important, that canteen and that water.

PR: All the heat, yeah.

LK: And they trained us pretty hard on water discipline.

PR: You went out; you boarded up on these converted destroyers and went out. Where and when was your first landing?

LK: The day after Christmas of 1944, we landed on Cape Gloucester, New Britain. New Britain is real close to New Guinea. Kind of a smaller addition of New Guinea. The Japs had a big installation at the upper end of New Britain at Rabaul. Rabaul was a big place for them. We landed at the bottom end and tried to seal them off there and secure some little airports they had.

PR: You'd load down off of your main ship into the Higgins boats?

LK: Yes.

PR: Circle around until you're all together, and then make a wave to the beach?

LK: Yeah.

PR: Do you recall the wave going into the beach, what that was like? A lot of enemy fire around you?

LK: No, this was my first landing. Of course we knew some of these places, [Turao?] and that was just hell. I contend they unloaded us at the wrong beach, because we landed unopposed. For about the first hour and a half we didn't have any opposition. Our worst part was getting to the beach. Let me tell you, you talk about stories, unusual -- I don't know why all these things happened to me.

(laughter) I guess the old First Sergeant liked me pretty well. And I was pretty mature for that bunch. I'd been on my own. Anyhow, we were getting ready to learn up. And Old Buckley said, "Kovar, you stay here. Be the last one out of the hole. See that everybody gets out of here, all our gear." So I went on about it and thought everything was all right. Found out after things quieted down a little on the beach, several days later, that they said, "You hear about Old Nelson?" Well, Old Nelson Yardbird, he hid in one of those holes down there and then took a .45 and shot himself through the left hand after we left. I wasn't looking for anybody very hard. (laughter) I said, "Hell, Buckley, they're gone. They all got there." A few days later they tell me. Of course, Old Buckley and I thought that they might court-martial him and send him to



Australia, and we'd go as witnesses. (laughter) But then there was nothing done.

PR: Was there any incoming fire when you were landing? You said it was totally unopposed.

LK: No, until we got in.

PR: Had you seen any enemy action or enemy planes or battles at all before that?

LK: No, this was my baptism.

PR: This was the first battle. What happened after the hour and a half then, after things stopped being quiet?

LK: They got back to their gun emplacements.

PR: The Japs.

LK: We started having some pretty good skirmishes. They came in with some of their planes, strafing us. We got in there. It got pretty hot and heavy. I guess the sad things and things that make you really realize about what war really is... When they started fighting, the first person I ever saw killed was a young kid we called Chicken. He was 16 years old. And here he had been hit with a big 20-millimeter, right in the gut. And that really makes you believe you're at war.

PR: Sinks it all home in a hurry, doesn't it?

LK: Yeah. (laughs) And those planes coming overhead, strafing... And there were some trees knocked down,

naturally. Everybody takes cover. I spotted a big old tree laying down. I (inaudible) crawling under it.

(laughs) And there was somebody crawling in from the other side. "Get out of there." "God damn, get your butt out of here." (laughter) When it was all clear, when I stood up and looked, it was Major Kean.

PR: Your Major? (laughter)

LK: I said, "Sorry about that, Major." He said, "That's all right, Boy."

PR: Was the medical care of the wounded pretty good? Did you have Medics right in with your unit?

LK: Yeah. Those guys... Those were all Navy men that trained. They really almost become Marines. The Marines love them. And they took care of the Marines. Yeah.

PR: Treat them and send them back to the Aid Station?

LK: Patch them up and send them back. These are guys, like Orderlies or whatever, not educated in medicine. We'd have one Doctor to the company or to two companies. And he'd have three or four Corpsmen in each company. He would do the heavy stuff or help guide them.

PR: Get them patched up enough to go back even further.

LK: Yeah.

PR: Would there be hospital ships off the coast that they'd evacuate them to?

LK: Yes.

PR: Then they probably came on back to Pearl Harbor or someplace.

LK: Yeah. I was aboard a hospital ship at Peliliu.

PR: How many days did Cape Gloucester last?

LK: About 24 or something.

PR: It wasn't a two-day battle, then.

LK: No, no. We dug that out and then patrolled all the mountainsides toward Rabaul, seeing if... Whatever the hell we were doing there. (laughs) Sometimes, who knew?

PR: So you finished the act of fighting and then just stayed and occupied the area.

LK: Yes.

PR: How long did the heavy fighting last? How many days?

LK: Probably 8 or 10 days back and forth. It rained at Cape Gloucester. Of the days we were there, it rained every day except two. And we lived in a foxhole. And your foxhole usually had at least two or three inches of water in it.

(break in audio)

LK: We were at Cape Gloucester, cleaning up that water.

(laughs) I think we were there 26 days, and it rained 24.

PR: In the foxhole was full of water all the time?

LK: Yeah. You could sleep in a foxhole with a little water in it.

PR: Did you have a tent over you at all?

LK: No.

PR: Raincoat? Anything?

LK: Poncho. But how you going to fight with a damn poncho on?

PR: Would it rain constantly, or would it be one of these  
afternoon big storms, and then the sun come out for some  
time?

LK: I guess like the monsoon. Every day. But the rain at that  
time of the year -- I don't know if it was that particular  
time of the year -- but it rained a whole lot.

PR: Did you ever get your clothes dry? Your shoes, socks dry?

LK: Once in a while.

PR: It'd be unusual.

LK: Yeah. I had an incident there going through the jungle. I  
tore one pants leg, one trouser leg of my dungarees. And I  
just had the one pair. What I had on, that's all I had  
that belonged to me. I tore that pant leg off. And about  
two days later I finally got another pair of pants. The  
amphib came in there to pick up some wounded. There was an  
extra old used pair of dungarees. (laughter) I traded  
something for them or whatever, and got them off of the  
amphib and put them back on so I'd have two legs again.

PR: Is that what'd you wear? A dungaree type pants?

LK: Yeah.

PR: Regular boots? Heavy boots? Combat boots?

LK: No, we had what we call boondockers, high-top boots. Not real heavy.

PR: What kind of shirt would you wear?

LK: Dungaree shirt.

PR: Long sleeved?

LK: Yeah.

PR: How about bugs? Do you recall bugs and mosquitos and things?

LK: Yeah. They'd get so bad. You'd try to fight the mosquitos. I've done such things as take the oil that they -- you have a little canister of oil that you grease your rifle that's found in the butt of that rifle. Take that out of there, get some of that oil, and smear it on your face, hoping that the damned mosquitos wouldn't bite you. And it helped some. But I didn't bathe. You don't do such things. No bath, no nothing.

PR: How about food? What sort of food did you have while you were in this active part?

LK: C-rations.

PR: Constantly? No warm food at all?

LK: Once in a while. Amphib may come up once a week or something like that. And if you're handy and can get through the jungle, they'd bring you up some hot chow.

PR: They'd prepare it on the ships and bring it in, in a thermos?

LK: They'd set up pretty fast, the shore. Get the food in and start preparing it ashore when they could get.

PR: Was this heavy jungle area?

LK: Heavy, yeah.

PR: Would there be any roads for communications?

LK: Very few trails that they had.

PR: Vehicles were worthless, then.

LK: Pretty much, yeah.

PR: Did you have any tanks for support at all, or didn't you need them?

LK: We used a few tanks there. They had trouble, too, in all that mud.

PR: Did you have hills you were attacking through, or was it pretty much level, like beach-level?

LK: Most of it had some hills in there. And very, very tough going the terrain, though.

PR: How were most of your battles? Rifle companies or rifle shots against each other?

LK: Yeah, rifles and mortars. We had one deal at Cape Gloucester at Suicide Creek, we called it later. We ran into an entrenchment along a little river going through there and just got the devil knocked out of us. In fact,

they relieved our Company Commander for some reason. And they brought the famous Chesty Puller, who was a Lieutenant Colonel then. Brought him in and he took over the company. Called the guys together, all of his Officers, so they told us. He said, "Fellas, we're going to take Suicide Creek tomorrow." Somebody said, one of the Officers said, "We sure need tanks." He said, "Boy, we ain't got no tanks. Boy, do you have rifles? You have men? You got bayonets? You got grenades? We'll take it in the morning." We took it.

PR: No more discussion. (laughter)

LK: That was Chesty Puller, though.

PR: Did the Japs ever try to infiltrate back through your lines and get behind you at all?

LK: Yeah, and they'd charge, the bonzai charge. They'd line them up, companies, battalions. And here they'd come, hollering and yelling and firing. If you're dug-in, you stay there and hope to stop them before they get to you. The next day, they'd be stacked up. You'd just kind of start stacking them there with your machineguns firing. They'd be all along there.

PR: Did you always have plenty of supplies? Ammunition, weapons, and things? Ever run short?

LK: We were always pretty well supplied.

PR: You had pretty good support onto the beach.

LK: They'd been spread out, places along the line. One end of the company might get into a lot of heavy fighting and use up their ammunition. Then you'd have to work it from the other one. But we always had plenty of fire. Some of those Japs charging didn't even have rifles. Just running. Maybe a bayonet or something. They claimed they were on dope or something, but I don't know what they...

PR: How far inland do you think you penetrated by the time the active fighting was over? Five miles? Twenty miles? Fifty miles?

LK: We went as far as about 20 miles going up towards Rabaul, scouting and so on, looking to see what we could find.

PR: Was Rabaul at the other end of that island?

LK: Yeah.

PR: That was actually a part of the island, not a separate (overlapping dialog; inaudible).

LK: No, it's part of New Britain.

PR: That was such an important base. We never did take Rabaul. We just bombed it.

LK: That's right.

PR: You guys set up a line, I guess, and they defended that line. The Rabaul end, they just let them have. And finally --



LK: They had to come up the mountain. And we were coming up the mountain the other side.

PR: So there was a mountain range separating you.

LK: It got pretty awful in the mountain range. (laughs)

PR: I can imagine. Where'd you get the word that that part of your action was over and you were going back or going somewhere else? After the 26 days?

LK: About 20 days deep into it or 22, something like that, we had everything pretty well mopped up, we knew. That's when I had the second encounter with the legendary Chesty Puller. I know we were ready to assault Hill 660. And that should be the end of our operation there. He come down the line, walking amongst his men. Wore a little old peashooter pistol on his hip. Didn't carry any other weapon. Smoked a damn pipe and chewed on it and looked at you. And everybody was Old Man. I know I was sitting there with some of the other guys along the trail, waiting to move up. Stopped and looked at me. He said, "Old Man, how you doing?" But here he was, about 50, and I'm 21. (laughter) I'd say, "It's a little tough, Colonel." "It'll be all right. Tomorrow we'll secure this place, and we'll go down to the airport and we'll get some tents." When we done that, they gave us these great big old tents that you could spread. And we could house maybe as many as 20 men

under it. If you could find a place to lay down that wasn't rainy, you could rest for a while. (laughter)

PR: That was a blessing. Where did you go after Cape Gloucester?

LK: After Cape Gloucester, they pulled us all together and took us to an island called Pavuvu. We were going to rebuild again.

PR: This was the whole 1st Division.

LK: Yes.

PR: Was the whole 1st Division the only one that was in the Cape Gloucester operation, or were there other units attached to you?

LK: We had a few Army Supply people.

PR: No other Rifle Companies.

LK: It was just the 1st Marine Division.

PR: Who did they leave back there? When they took you out, who came in and took over that? Some Army units?

LK: They brought some Army units.

PR: Just to keep it secure.

LK: The way they done that Pacific, I don't understand; I don't know if anybody does. We were under MacArthur's command there. And of course, the Marine Corps being a Navy outfit, really our big Commander out there was Nimitz. Then they moved us. And there was an argument about --

MacArthur didn't want to give the 1st Division up. They had just assigned them to him temporarily for Cape Gloucester. He wanted to keep them for his Philippines operation. And he and Nimitz got into it about it. But it did revert back to Nimitz.

PR: Yeah, I think they drew a line. MacArthur had Australia and that side, and Nimitz had the other side.

LK: And they nearly starved us during the period there when we got relieved. They were deciding where we were going to go. So the Army wouldn't send us any supplies. Navy wouldn't send us any supplies. We lived on soup and K-rations.

PR: What was at this Pavuvu? Was there an established base?

LK: Worst hellhole. It was a coconut patch the English had there, a lot of it. But it was just jungle. For the last few years, they hadn't taken care of those coconut places, harvested or anything. So there was coconuts all over the place. We got there from Cape Gloucester. First thing we had to do was set us up a place where we could live. We put some tents together and built some paths and roads so we could get around. This was the 1st Division only. That was our exclusive place, was Pavuvu.

PR: And there was nothing there before you got there.

LK: Nothing. We didn't have to fight anybody.

PR: You had to make your own way, though.

LK: Yeah.

PR: Did you have tents there you could live in?

LK: Yeah, we finally got tents, six-man tents.

PR: I guess you're getting some regular food by this time.

LK: Yeah, a little better. It was getting a little better.

They found some cattle on Pavuvu and slaughtered some.

(laughter)

PR: How long did you lick your wounds and rehabilitate there?

LK: That was in January we got there, or the first of February.

And we left there about the first of September or maybe a few days before that. We were getting ready for our next landing.

PR: So you had a pretty good recuperation time.

LK: Yeah.

PR: What would you do with your time there? Did you have some more training and exercises?

LK: Oh, yes. You never quit training. Not in the Marine Corps. (laughs)

PR: Get replacements coming in?

LK: Had replacements coming in.

PR: How many men would you guess were casualties out of your company they had to replace from Cape Gloucester? Half of them? Quarter of them? Ten percent?

LK: No, Cape Gloucester, other than the jungles and the water and the mosquitos and that, wasn't too tough a campaign. We probably had 15, 20 percent. Compared to Peliliu, that's a different story.

PR: Did you get rumor that another invasion was going to go on?

LK: We knew. Of course we didn't have any idea where. But we knew we were getting ready for another invasion, yes.

PR: How'd they move you out? The same way, in those converted destroyer things?

LK: Yeah. And we had some bigger ships, and I don't know what the hell they were, really, what they called them. We were afloat from Pavuvu to Peliliu for around two weeks. We were aboard that, and we'd stop off at old Guadalcanal and make some landings, mock landings.

PR: So you didn't go direct. You sort of started your way down to Peliliu.

LK: Yeah, killing time and getting there.

PR: What day was your landing on Peliliu?

LK: September the 15th. That's in '44.

PR: That was the same type of operation? You'd have Higgins boats you'd load into?

LK: Higgins boats. Well, we had more of the amphibious thing, the tractor thing. We went ashore in those, mostly. See, there was so much coral there. Even those amphibs, they

didn't make it. In fact, I think the wave I was in, we were the only amphib that made it all the way over, out of about 14 or 15. They'd get caught on that coral.

PR: Even the amphibious tractor. I know the Higgins boats were worthless, but...

LK: And the Japs, they were zeroed in on us. You'd get hit by the Jap or get caught on coral. I got a good friend -- he's still my best friend; he and I enlisted together -- Albert Martin. He was in a Machinegun Squadron, an Ammunition Carrier and a guard to protect the machinegun. Their craft got hung up on coral. He slipped over the side and they had to wade in. And he waded in. He's not a very tall fella. (laughter) If there'd been one more inch of water, he couldn't have made it. And he had two boxes of rifle and his rifle slung over his shoulder to make it ashore. He said he just dropped down on the bottom of that water and set that one box of ammunition, and finally made it in with one extra box of ammunition in his rifle.

(laughs)

PR: What did you load into? One of these amphibious tractors?

LK: Yeah, and we unloaded on the beach. And it's the damnedest mess. I don't see how they get them as straight as they do. But we landed with the guys in my platoon and part of another platoon we were in with this craft. And we were

lost. I don't know why me, but I didn't believe in sitting around. I don't even remember now where our Commander was or whoever. (laughter) But I said, "I'm going to find out where we are and where we're going to go." We all got down in kind of a sand trap. I went and one of these other guys says, "Big Dog, I want to go with you. I'm going to go help you." So he and I went out and found our group, found where they were, and went back and got our people. We found the rest of the company.

PR: So things got sort of jumbled up on the way in.

LK: Yeah. And if you didn't keep moving in, you'd get them stacked up on the beach and the Japs would just slaughter you.

PR: Were the Japs shelling you all the way in at this time?

LK: They'd been at Peliliu. Peliliu is a two-by-five island: two miles long by five miles wide. That's all. Coral as hard as that concrete out there. You couldn't dig a foxhole.

PR: Tear you to pieces if you step on it? Was it sharp?

LK: Not that much.

PR: Just hard.

LK: Just hard. So you find a place where one of those big naval shells hit in that coral, and you'd have a place the size of a basketball. About all you'd see there. And they

were zeroed in. I think they could drop one in your hip pocket.

PR: Your craft got right up onto the beach.

LK: We got up on the beach and then we moved on in.

PR: Were a lot of coconut groves there? Cover at all?

LK: No. Everything was torn down. Supposedly the Navy in charge of the bombardment for the landing, the night before, they said we'd run out of targets. "This is going to be a cakewalk. There's no targets left." The targets were all hid back in the caves, in those coral caves. And instead of walking through there in 72 hours, I was wounded on the 33rd day.

PR: Thirty-third? On this two-by-five island?

LK: On this two-by-five island. Eighteenth of October. I landed on the 15th of September. I think back now, "How did I dodge being hit that long? (laughter) They finally got me."

PR: Did most of your troops get ashore, at least establish a beach head right away?

LK: Yeah. But then as we kind of squeezed them into the real hills and coral, they just dug in. You couldn't do anything with them.

PR: Hand-to-hand almost. Were you one of the Bazooka Squad at that time?



LK: Yes. We didn't use them much then because where we were, we could use tanks. A tank would come up. That was better.

PR: Did you keep getting reinforcements and supply at your side?

LK: Yeah. First the Seabees landed and fixed up the airport and all that. We captured the airport in two days. Then the fighter pilots had a place to land and all that stuff.

PR: So you had fighter support right on the island, then.

LK: Yeah.

PR: Then you just kept going on.

(break in audio)

PR: You encircled the island, even. And the Japs were on the high ground in the middle.

LK: Yeah. And we'd taken the beaches.

PR: Were the Japs still getting reinforcements and supplies on their side?

LK: No. But they were supposed to be one of the best fortified and supplied spots in the Pacific.

PR: Did they have a lot of dugouts or ditches and forts?

LK: Yeah, they had caves in there, all set up.

PR: I heard they made defenses with those coconut logs, which would just take a shell and it would almost bounce off; it wouldn't blow them apart.

LK: That was true at Cape Gloucester. There was a lot of those broken-up deals. Your bazooka was kind of ineffective unless you could find some real solid something to hit it on. It's going to hit.

PR: Like a blotter, just soak it up, not do anything.

LK: Yeah.

PR: But Peliliu didn't have that many.

LK: No, there wasn't much. Hardly any coconuts.

PR: It was mostly coral. Even the hills were coral.

LK: Yes. It was a son of a gun.

PR: Did you get the same thing: rain every day? You're still in the rainy season?

LK: No, I don't remember it raining.

PR: Just hot.

LK: Oh, it was hot.

PR: Water supply was always tough?

LK: We had about as much loss from heat exhaustion as wounded.

(laughs)

PR: How would you get your water? Where would they get the water from?

LK: They'd bring it in from the Navy tankers. (laughs) They pulled a booboo. Talk about water... Likely ruined about half of our company and some others. They brought water in, stacked in these five-gallon expeditionary cans, they

called them. Little square water can. They use them for gasoline mostly. Somebody had somehow got screwed up, and we ended up with those cans -- they filled them for us and brought them out to the line for us -- that had gasoline in there.

PR: They put water in the gasoline? (laughs) Good Lord.

LK: Nobody had cleaned those tanks, those expeditionary cans out. A lot of people got pretty sick.

PR: That's all you had.

LK: Yeah, and wait for another supply or somebody to rearrange.

PR: You couldn't filter it out. Somebody heard about that, I'm sure.

LK: (laughter) Yeah. But they were transferring them back and forth so fast, reassigning them. A lot of SNAFU.

PR: It's amazing how well they did, though, with all these diverse battles and things, keeping them supplied. I'm amazed that they kept the supplies coming in and how much they had in the way of supplies. You were wounded on Peliliu; what day were you wounded?

LK: Eighteenth of October.

PR: And the battle there continued on for --

LK: We were the last action that the 1st Marine -- that day was the last day, the 18th. Last day for us. You talk about casualties... We had supposedly, wounded or killed, my

company supposedly had 70-percent casualty. And the other two Rifle Regiments were nearly that bad.

PR: So it was just continuous heavy exchange back and forth from the Japs.

LK: Yeah. And you'd plot a little battle plan to go in and dig them out from one area. We went in one area one day, somewhere after we'd been there two weeks or more. They sent Lieutenant Dunn and his 3rd Platoon up a drawing to go up in there to try to capture a little hill up in there. And the Japs let him and this outfit move right in. Never fired a shot; never heard anything. We thought we were on the other hill, safe. And when we got out from our protective cover, they had such great fire discipline they just stayed hidden. And we got up there, and then they just annihilated that platoon. There was six men came down off that hill. Our Corpsmen were killed. That's what they did. You just tried to punch here and punch there and go around different areas.

PR: Would they have a lot of snipers in the trees?

LK: Yes.

PR: That was a common thing?

LK: There was a lot of those guys.

PR: How would you spot them or get rid of them? Was there a system to it, or was it just lucky to see them move?

LK: Well, you just hunt them like you're hunting squirrel, I guess. (laughs) Just trying to find them. I know they got one of our Colonels who had no business being up where he was. Hennigan, the snipers got him. Then we got after it and got the sniper. But these guys, the Japs, they'd come out at night and slip through your lines. That's the reason I got hit. (laughs) I get ticked off. My truck with the Army, (laughs) we had circled this group of hills and had them pretty well tied and had the airport right down there protected and whatever. So they a couple days earlier they relieved our company and replaced us with guys from 81st Wildcat or something that had been training in Pearl Harbor, and sent them in there. We had set up our foxholes. And you set up your foxholes so at night nobody gets between you. Two men and two men and two men. These guys got up there and it was pretty quiet for a couple of days. So they decided instead of foxholes they'd set up outposts. That meant that about four or six of them would get together in this outpost. And hell, they couldn't see what was going on between them. The Japs slipped in behind them and start dropping mortars on the airport. So that's when they called L Company -- (laughs) I guess we were about the last left that could do any fight -- and sent us out to take that airport, take the area where they could

use the airport. That's when I got wounded. And it was supposed to be, just go down there and wipe out a couple of machinegun nests and load and go to Pavuvu. And our Captain was killed; that was the second Captain we had killed there. They just goofed off. You didn't play footsie with those Japs.

PR: No. You'd give them a toehold and they'd take a mile. So you knew that was your last day, and that's the day you were wounded.

LK: Yes.

PR: Who came in after that? This 81st Division took over instead of you?

LK: Yeah.

PR: And you all drew back.

LK: Yeah, we drew back.

PR: Where did the division go to?

LK: We went back to Pavuvu. Course, I was through. When I was wounded --

PR: Tell me about what happened after you were wounded. You're hit, number one.

LK: I'm hit. I look over and Corporal Bach was with me.

PR: That was the other gunman? Was hit also?

LK: He was hit, ranging through his shoulder and out his back. And mine was hit going down in the shoulder, going and

ranging through my chest. He's down; I'm down. I get out the first aid kit and try to bandage myself. Didn't have any luck. I tried to bandage him. And he couldn't move, get around or anything. I finally said -- they'd sent us off about 100 yards or so to the flank. We were the only ones there down that trail. We'd knocked out one of those boogers, and we were getting on another one. Anyhow, I said, "Bach, I tried helping. You couldn't do anything." So I said, "Just get down here. You're under cover right here. I know where the Mortar Platoon is, and I'll get them to come get you. If we don't, we're going to both bleed to death right here." So I took off and got to where the Mortar Platoon was. And this real good friend of mine come up to help me. I stood there and got him going to go get Bach. They got him and brought him in. He evacuated, too. But I was one mad SO... Here I'd been ready to go back. I don't know why I wanted to go back to Pavuvu, but at least I'd made the battle. I just raised hell. This guy, my friend Willy, says, "Come on, Big Dog." They called me Big Dog; I was one of the bigger guys in the outfit. (laughs) He said, "Let me help you." There was a trail a little further down, like to the front of this building, where they could get a jeep up there and haul you out of there, and get you back to some first aid. I

wouldn't let him help me, but he walked alongside of me on the trail. We got right by the jeep and I said, "Willy, you better help me." I crumbled. And when I woke up, they were pumping blood plasma into me. I had a thing tied up on a twig. (laughs)

PR: Had you gotten any Medic treatment up to that time?

LK: No.

PR: They put you on a jeep and evacuated you back to an Aid Station?

LK: They gave me that blood right there at the jeep, because I had passed out. And I came to, and they reloaded me. I came to, and they took us to a tent area kind of designated as a First Aid. And old Bach and I, we stayed there. The next morning, we went aboard a hospital ship there.

PR: Took you out in a Higgins boat?

LK: Yeah.

PR: To the hospital ship?

LK: Yeah.

PR: And they had full operating rooms and everything on that hospital ship?

LK: Oh, beautiful. And food. (laughter) They had food.

PR: They have to do surgery on you right away?

LK: No.

PR: The bleeding had stopped?



LK: The bleeding had stopped. It took a couple stiches or something. I don't know.

PR: Your symptoms were settled down.

LK: Yeah.

PR: Did you have any blood in your chest at all?

LK: I guess I did. I had that lung became collapsed. One Doctor had me breathing in a paper sack to build that lung.

PR: Expand it up again.

LK: Of course, that was later on. But I was in pretty good shape. I was ambulatory. I could move around a little bit.

PR: The next day?

LK: Yeah.

PR: So they just stitched the wound up basically.

LK: Yeah.

PR: Had it broken any bones at all?

LK: No.

PR: Missed the bone.

LK: I don't know, just right off the gun and it scattered some little pieces of lead.

PR: How long were you there?

LK: That day, the hospital ship took us to the Admiralty Islands. They had a hospital there.

PR: Do you remember the name of the hospital ship? Was there a name to it?

LK: The USS *Solace*.

PR: You went to the Admiralties. There was a big General Hospital there on the Admiralties?

LK: More so. Not real big, but a little better. We just stayed there two days. Then they turned around and flew us to Guadalcanal. There was a pretty good hospital. We landed there. (laughs) What they'd do, they'd examine you and look at you, to decide -- there were stages of getting you ready to go back or sending you home, or something. After you were there a while, they'd examine you like they did me. And they said, "Well, it's going to take more than 60 days to get him back. Send him back to Base 10." I don't know, there's so damn many of them islands... But they had a real nice hospital there for the General (inaudible). They sent me back. We flew over there. And they reevaluated us again in a couple of days. And then they put me aboard ship and sent me back to San Diego. They decided that it was going to take longer.

PR: Were you having any trouble? Pain? Trouble breathing? Couldn't move that arm?

LK: That arm, I couldn't move. In fact, I had this arm in a sling until this one Doctor in MOB 10 examined me. And he

said, "Boy, what are you doing with that sling? Give me that sling." Took that sling and put it away. He said, "Don't you ever put on that sling again." He said, "You're going to come out of this damn thing a cripple."

PR: With a frozen arm.

LK: Yeah. He said, "And I want you to go down to the Red Cross hut every day. Try to play a little ping pong." You'd think, this being my left shoulder, why do I have -- but I'd catch myself. I'm batting that ping pong ball with my right hand. I lose it and I try to reach for it. Got that old arm working again. I guess he was right.

PR: This was on Guadalcanal?

LK: No, this is... (laughs) God damn, is that the New Hebrides? I guess in the New Hebrides. I forget the name of that. That was later.

PR: After Guadalcanal.

LK: Yeah. They brought me to Guadalcanal and then --

PR: Then another recuperation unit.

LK: Yeah. Then they give another look at me. I know I came back from the Red Cross hut one day right after lunch. And the nurse on-duty said, "Say, Kovar, how would you like to go to San Diego?" I said, "Don't be teasing me about it." (laughter) She said, "The Doctors just had a conference. They examined your report and so on. They're going to send

you back home. You'll be leaving in the morning."

(laughs) And I went aboard some other trashy old ship.

(laughter) But it was great.

PR: Another Liberty ship type of thing?

LK: Yeah.

PR: Was this full of wounded, or guys just rotating back?

LK: Mostly these were wounded they picked up there in the New Hebrides.

PR: Lot of guys in bad shape? Missing limbs and amputees?

LK: Yeah, you'd see some. I called them "my kids," kids that had come in as replacements that lost an arm just being really careless.

PR: By this time they were all stable. There weren't any IVs dripping or anything like that.

LK: Oh, no. They'd get you stabilized pretty well.

PR: Several weeks or months after the wounds.

LK: Yeah, months.

PR: Was the idea to keep you there and send you back?

LK: Yes.

PR: Send you back to the States.

LK: We were getting a lot of people in uniform by then into the States. They eased up on you.

PR: How long did it take to get from the Hebrides back? You went into San Francisco?

LK: No, went back to San Diego.

PR: How long did it take on that?

LK: Seemed like that was six or eight days, something like that.

PR: What happened at San Diego?

LK: First thing, they gave me a real meal. (laughter) Fresh eggs and milk and celery stalks and stuff.

PR: You thought you were in heaven.

LK: (laughter) You got it, man. They bunked us in there and then start examining us. I came up and they looked at me, checked me over, and asked me if I had any questions. I said, "Yeah, what about those bullets I've got?" I had been hit by three rounds of ammunition. One was a little tracer that I've got up here. And two were soft-nose. And I said, "What are we going to do with them?" They said, "What do you want to do with them?" I said, "I've always heard this thing about slugs moving. What happens?" He said, "Those slugs will be all right. They're going to grow a gristle around them. If they're smooth around the edges, they're going to grow a gristle and they'll be there forever." I said, "And what other?" "If they got any sharp points on them, it'll cut through that gristle as that gristle grows. And it'll possibly move that deal." I said, "Then what?" I said, "Would you just go ahead and

dig them out?" So they scheduled me for surgery and dug out two of them. And the third one I guess splattered, because I had three entrances and only two bullets. Yeah, I got that right in a group.

PR: You got hit by three slugs, though?

LK: Yeah, machinegun.

PR: Do you remember getting whopped, the feeling of the force when that hit you?

LK: Oh, yeah. That's when I was back with Bach there. That's when it spun me around and set me on my butt. I said, "My God, my arm." I looked down there and (laughter) it (inaudible) good.

PR: How long did they keep you at San Diego?

LK: I stayed there about six weeks or so. They asked us, "Any you guys want to get transferred closer to home, make an application. If it's feasible to do it, maybe you can get closer to home." So I came to Corpus Christi to the Naval Airbase at Corpus, which is real nice.

PR: What timeframe was this that you get back to Corpus?

LK: I guess somewhere along in May.

PR: May of '45?

LK: Yes. Then stayed there. I got discharged in September, I believe.

PR: You just stayed at Corpus.

LK: Yeah, stayed there.

PR: Were you ambulatory?

LK: I could do anything. (laughs) You could go to town, but you had to have some sort of job to do something.

(laughter) I got a job. They had a big place out there where they took all the mattresses and everything and de-fumigate them or whatever under high steam and all of that. I put in for that job, because (laughter) some of those mattresses that come out on the other side, you pulled them -- you didn't handle them except as they come out after the steam and all that. But I pulled them out of the way. And then the Corpsman would come and get them and take them. In the meantime, they made a good place to take a nap (laughter) after lunch. You'd get ready for liberty. That was going into Corpus.

PR: That was a pretty plush time, then.

LK: Yes.

PR: Was there a regular Navy hospital there at that time?

LK: Yes.

PR: Pretty good size?

LK: Yeah. I don't know how many or what, but there was a lot of troops in there.

PR: Why did they retain you there so long? Why didn't they just discharge you right away? Why did they keep you on? Did you have an enlistment time?

LK: No, a duration. I enlisted for the duration of the war. I don't know. They kind of hated to give up a trained person, in case they needed him.

PR: Did you have any discomfort at that time? Were you feeling good?

LK: No, I was feeling all right.

PR: Just like you do now? Still aching a little bit?

LK: They sent me to duty there to the Marine detachment at the hospital for about a week. We messed around. They had me chasing prisoners, taking prisoners and cleaning up the grounds. And I griped about that. I didn't like that. I turned myself back into Sick Bay, complained about something. I didn't want to be chasing prisoners. (laughter) They called me in for another exam. Of course, V-J Day had happened there in Corpus. It was the damndest celebration you ever saw in your life. I happened to be downtown and joined in the celebration. It was really something.

PR: Where were you at V-E Day? You were back in San Diego?

LK: No. Where was I? Yeah, I guess so.



PR: Just about getting there. Then V-J Day, they went wild.

When did you get your discharge? Shortly after that?

LK: Yes, they came through, looking at us again. (laughs)

high-ranking Doctor came through there. Looked at me and

looked at my charge. Said, "How would you like to go

home?" I said, "Sir, are you kidding?" (laughter) He

said, "Survey him out." Old Navy slang. "Survey. "Get

rid of him. Survey." (laughter)

PR: That's great. What was your rank?

LK: Corporal. In the Marine Corps, sometimes the ranks are

pretty hard to get.

PR: Did you have an MOS?

LK: I think the only thing they show on there is Expert

Rifleman.

PR: Does this have a list of your badges and things?

LK: Yeah, it's got some stuff in there. I was trained in

demolition and that stuff. Went to special school for

that, but it's not on my discharge. I noticed the other

day that Expert Rifleman. Somewhere they even used the

word "excellent" about something. I thought, "Damn," maybe

I can get -- (laughter)

PR: They know you're so good. Did you have another discharge

paper?

LK: That's it.

PR: That's what you have. The Army had a little different form, which listed your foreign duty. I'll read through this. This probably has it in here, too. Expert Rifleman. South Pacific. Wounded October 18th. Yeah, that's right. That was two days ago.

LK: Yesterday was my anniversary. Fifty-six years.

PR: Where did the 1st Division go after they recuperated at Pavuvu? Did they go back into other --

LK: Yeah, they went to Okinawa. After that, some of them went to China for some security or something.

PR: Quite a history.

LK: Yes. Hell of an outfit.

PR: Thanks for sharing all this with me; that's fascinating. (off-topic dialogue; not transcribed) I think we'll terminate. You have anything else you want to add? You think of other stories or something, let me know and I'll come down.

LK: I got a couple little stories. (laughs) I don't know whether you --

PR: Yeah, some of them you don't want to put down.

LK: No, we won't put it on there. (laughter)

PR: I better not hear about them; I might be called to testify. (laughter)

LK: Oh, God.

PR: Marines are a good bunch. You had a lot of camaraderie, didn't you?

LK: Sure did.

PR: That was always in the Marine group.

LK: Yeah, you knew this guy over here was going to be there, and this guy was going to be over here. Once in a while, I guess you find one like Nelson. Incidentally, with Nelson, they took him to the hospital, got him all fixed up, and sent him back to the outfit, and gave him a BAR. I don't know if you're familiar with a Browning automatic rifle. They gave him a hot one that time. I think he thought he was going to get court-martialed and get a couple days in the brig and be out of it. And he got wounded. But to my knowledge, he lived through the war.

PR: BAR -- that was a focal point for the Japs firing. They hated that thing.

LK: Yeah, you had one BAR in every group. And that BAR, man... I don't know why it happened. That BAR is heavy, and the ammunition. And most of the time (laughs) some small guy got that BAR.

PR: (laughter) Little shrimp?

LK: Yeah.

END OF AUDIO FILE

