

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview with

Ralph C. Simoneau

Germantown, Wisconsin

October 15, 2007

D Company, 2nd Battalion, 27th Marines, 5th Marine Division

60mm Mortar Squad

Landed 1st Wave on Iwo Jima

In Japan Occupation - 11 Months

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is October 15, 2007. I am interviewing Mr. Ralph C. Simoneau by telephone. His telephone number is area code 262-251-0913. His address is N115W 16724 Royal Court, Germantown, Wisconsin 53022. This interview is in support of the National Museum of Pacific War, Center for Pacific War Studies, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer

Ralph, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today and I want to thank you for your service to our country during World War II. Now the first thing I need to do is get an alternative contact. We have found out that sometimes in two or three years we try to contact somebody and he has moved or something has happened. Do you have a son or daughter or someone that you might give us a name and phone number in case we can't reach you?

Mr. Simoneau

No children.

Mr. Misenhimer

A brother or a friend or someone?

Mr. Simoneau

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, we'll just try our best to get you here then.

Mr. Simoneau

I'll be here until I croak. (Laugh)

Mr. Misenhimer

Now the next thing I would like to do is read to you this agreement with the Nimitz Museum. When I do these in person I give them to the man to read and sign but since this is by phone, let me read it to you to make sure it is okay. "Agreement Read." Is that okay with you?

Mr. Simoneau

That's okay.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me ask you first, what is your birth date?

Mr. Simoneau

July 5, 1925.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Mr. Simoneau

I was born in Washburn, Wisconsin.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Simoneau

I had one sister that died three or four years ago.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was she involved in war work at all?

Mr. Simoneau

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your father's occupation?

Mr. Simoneau

Dad was a master painter and also in his later years he was the business agent for the Painter's Local here in the Milwaukee area.

Mr. Misenhimer

You grew up during the Depression. How did the Depression affect you and your family?

Mr. Simoneau

I guess it affected us the same as everyone. We didn't have anything. We went on what was called "The County", which means that my dad would go down to the county office with a coaster wagon and there they would dish out supplies to you, flour, eggs, sugar etc. and some can goods etc. Nowadays as you know it's called welfare. They get welfare checks. But then you had to go down and pick up the stuff. The last thing that you ever wanted to say was that you were on The Dole but it was a necessity back then.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was your father able to keep working during most of the time in the Depression.

Mr. Simoneau

He worked on and off. He didn't work steady enough to really provide enough income to take care of all of our needs so that's why we had to go on The County but he did supplement the county things by doing a little work.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was he a union member?

Mr. Simoneau

Oh yes. A very, very strong union member.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then of course, they would help him to get work when they could.

Mr. Simoneau

Exactly. A lot of times in the mornings he would go down to the union hall and if there was any work available they would hand it out to individuals.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Simoneau

I went to high school in Milwaukee at North Division High School.

Mr. Misenhimer

What year did you finish there?

Mr. Simoneau

I didn't finish. When I enlisted in the Marine Corps I still had a year to go. When I got discharged I went back to the high school and they said that I could get a diploma through the GED program, which I took and got my diploma through that.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you go into the Marines?

Mr. Simoneau

I went into the Marines in 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you have a date?

Mr. Simoneau

I don't have a date. I enlisted just a little bit before my 18th birthday which would have been July of 1943. I went in, in November of 1943. So I actually went in when I was 18 years old but I did enlist when I was 17.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did your parents have to sign for you to enlist?

Mr. Simoneau

Yes. I guess, if I remember correctly, they were pretty glad. (Laugh)

Mr. Misenhimer

I know a lot of people needed to get that other mouth to feed out of the way. (Laugh)

Mr. Simoneau

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you choose the Marines?

Mr. Simoneau

I don't know. My buddy and I had gone to a movie and I think it was some movie about the Marines and it looked kind of glamorous with the uniform and it looked adventurous and exciting. So a good buddy of mine, by the name of Ray Nickel, went down to enlist. He didn't have any teeth. He had false teeth so the Marines wouldn't take him and so he enlisted in the Navy and I got into the Marine Corps.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever get that nice blue dress uniform that the Marines had?

Mr. Simoneau

No. In those times, frankly the only blue uniforms I ever saw were what we called the Sea School guys. At San Diego there was an area of Marines that had served on Navy vessels, battleships and cruisers and etc., they were what we called Sea School. They were sort of the cream of the crop of the Marines. All of us Marines wanted to be in Sea School. Occasionally you would see them in blue uniforms but we were never issued a blue uniform and I never even knew if they were available for purchase. I never saw any in all my training.

Mr. Misenhimer

Speaking of Sea School, I've heard of people speak of Fleet Marines, what are the Fleet Marines?

Mr. Simoneau

Actually, we were all Fleet Marines because we used the Fleet to get where we were going so they kind of called us all Fleet Marines. I suppose maybe, technically, the Fleet Marines would be the Marines that served aboard naval vessels.

Mr. Misenhimer

The way I've heard it use most of the times, it seemed to encompass all Marines.

Mr. Simoneau

Yes, exactly. That's my understanding. But I think basically on a technical basis it would just mean the Marines that served on the naval vessels but it did encompass us all. We were all Fleet Marines because we got on boats or ships and went somewhere.

Mr. Misenhimer

I have another question. On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Do you

recall hearing about that?

Mr. Simoneau

Oh yes. As a matter of fact we were reading the Sunday paper and listening to the radio. My father listened to a Catholic Priest by the name of Father Coglin. By today's thinking he would almost be considered a communist or a socialist. He was very radical but for some reason my dad listened to him. He was Catholic. I was brought up in Catholic school and my dad was listening to him. The broadcast was interrupted and they came in with the news that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your reaction to that?

Mr. Simoneau

I had never, and I don't think a lot of people had, ever heard of Pearl Harbor before this, nothing. My reaction was just kind of wonderment. Wondering where this was and what it would lead to but it wasn't any great shock or anything to me. As I recall it didn't stir me up or get me all excited.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any idea how this might affect you?

Mr. Simoneau

No, I had absolutely no idea at all how it might affect me.

Mr. Misenhimer

The rumor at that time among many people was, "Oh, it'll be over in less than a year."

Mr. Simoneau

Well I guess the bigwigs always thought like that. Just like Iwo Jima. They thought it

would be three days. The bigwigs always underestimate things.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes and that was people's opinion too.

Mr. Simoneau

That was probably because everyone thought we were such a powerful nation. I don't know why because at that particular time in our history we had no military services to speak of at all. It has always kind of amazed me that people had the idea that we were all powerful.

Mr. Misenhimer

I'm not sure they thought we were that strong. I think they thought Japan was that weak.

Mr. Simoneau

That might be it exactly.

Mr. Misenhimer

The draft started in 1940. In 1941 it came up for renewal. Are you aware that it only passed by one vote in the Congress.

Mr. Simoneau

I had heard that in later years. I didn't know it at the time. I think that even the Declaration of War was not unanimous.

Mr. Misenhimer

There were two I think that voted against it. *(Editor's Note: With the exception of Janet Rankin (Montana) Congress voted unanimously to declare war on Japan on December 8, 1941. The US never declared war on Italy and Germany. They declared war on the US on December 10, 1941.)* We were that isolationist.

Mr. Simoneau

Oh yes, absolutely.

Mr. Misenhimer

That they only passed it by one vote for the draft. If it hadn't been for that we would have been even worse prepared.

Mr. Simoneau

Absolutely.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go into the Marines at?

Mr. Simoneau

I went into the Recruit Depot at San Diego.

Mr. Misenhimer

But you joined in Milwaukee, right?

Mr. Simoneau

Yes, which was a little unusual. As I understand now, if you live east of the Mississippi you went to Parris Island. If you lived west of the Mississippi you went to San Diego, because those were the two recruit depots for the Marine Corps at the time. Of course, I lived east of the Mississippi so I have no idea how I ended up in San Diego. Maybe they were short of recruits or what, I have no idea.

Mr. Misenhimer

It could have been who had an opening for the recruits. Where were you sworn in at?

Mr. Simoneau

I was sworn in at Milwaukee.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you travel out to San Diego?

Mr. Simoneau

We traveled by train. I think it was a four day ride. Just before we boarded the train a couple of the Recruit Sergeants appointed a couple of the guys to be in charge of the group. I was not one of them. Then we all filed onto the train and took off. I would remark that one of the highlights of the trip out there was that each time we stopped the Salvation Army were generally always at the railroad station. As a matter of fact they gave me a sweater that just several of years ago, I finally disposed of it. It was completely worn out. They gave us socks and sweaters and mufflers and donuts and coffee, etc. That was almost virtually at every stop that we made with the train. The Salvation Army was there. I never forgot that and all these years I've always contributed to the Salvation Army.

Mr. Misenhimer

There is a question that I normally ask later, but I'll ask it now, did you have any experience with the Red Cross while you were in the service?

Mr. Simoneau

The Red Cross, I'll tell you, I don't know anybody in the service that had any liking for the Red Cross. In many instances they were charging for things that they had. I absolutely have never heard anybody that had anything good to say about the Red Cross during World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer

Most of the people that I ask either had no experience with the Red Cross or bad

experience.

Mr. Simoneau

Yes and that's strange.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've heard that so many times. On that trip out there, did you have a place to sleep?

Mr. Simoneau

Yes, it was almost like a troop train. I believe that there were bunks that were three high on that car. Much the same that we had aboard ship except that aboard ship I think they were five and six high. It was that kind of bed.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was this a box car that they had converted? Or, what was it?

Mr. Simoneau

I don't know. I don't think it was a box car. I think it was some kind of passenger car that I think they said they put these bunks in.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did it have windows on the sides?

Mr. Simoneau

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about the food on the trip out?

Mr. Simoneau

The food, I have no recollection of that whatsoever.

Mr. Misenhimer

Had you been out of Wisconsin before this on any long trips?

Mr. Simoneau

When I was maybe 14 or 15 years old, my dad, one of his very good friends was the Fleet Commander of the Columbia Steamship Line. Those were the coal and ore boat companies on the Great Lakes. Because I was kind of a wild guy my dad took me to Cleveland, Ohio and introduced me to this individual. His name escapes me right now. He said that he would put me aboard ship as a deck hand. That was supposed to make a man out of me or change me around or something. So yes, I had been alone and away from home before.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about getting to San Diego. What happened there?

Mr. Simoneau

I always kind of laugh every time I see a documentary or things about the Marine Corps and about the yellow footsteps that the recruits come in at 2:00 in the morning and everybody rushes out and has to go on these yellow footprints. Well, there weren't any yellow footprints at San Diego at that time. To my recollection, I think we landed there sometime around noon. It was very frantic. None of us had any experience of what we were dealing with right then because the DI's were doing a lot of hollering and etc. It was not frightening, but very disconcerting.

Mr. Misenhimer

Speaking of the yellow footprints, I had never heard of them until I went to that museum out in Virginia.

Mr. Simoneau

Is that right? I can show you a number of documentaries. As a matter of fact I'm going to send one that I recorded off of public television called, "Making Marines." Apparently this yellow footprint thing has been going on for quite a long time. I can see the necessity for it because it does get everybody lined up and at least gets their feet in the proper position, that is an attention type of thing. And of course, they do say that you are standing in footprints of Marines that served on Guadalcanal and etc. etc. I guess it kind of does something for the new recruits.

Mr. Misenhimer

But I don't know how many Marines I have interviewed, 30 or 40 or 50 or whatever, and none of them have ever mentioned that.

Mr. Simoneau

Is that right?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes.

Mr. Simoneau

If they were from WWII or the Korean War that is probably a fact.

Mr. Misenhimer

These were all from WWII. That's all we do is WWII veterans. So then, when you got there, what else happened?

Mr. Simoneau

We were allowed to call home. One call home to make sure that our parents knew that we arrived there safe and sound. They took us to chow because it was around noon when we

got there. After chow they took us to some supply building or something and they issued us uniforms. That was kind of a joke because they just kind of looked at you and grabbed one and threw it at you. Most of us got stuff that didn't fit. Sooner or later we were able to get sizes that did fit.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you had been in your civilian clothes until then?

Mr. Simoneau

Yes, exactly.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you live in there?

Mr. Simoneau

At San Diego we lived in a tent camp. They had tents. I don't know if you've ever been to San Diego but it is a beautiful base with beautiful Spanish type architecture buildings there, very, very nice. But apparently they weren't equipped for the number of people that they were handling because of WWII so they sent up tents. We lived in tents.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of tents were they?

Mr. Simoneau

I think there was about six or eight of us. I think maybe six is more right. They had six of us and we were sleeping in regular what we called Army cots, canvas cots.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were these what they called the pyramid tents?

Mr. Simoneau

They were square.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they have wooden sides?

Mr. Simoneau

They were completely canvas, to the best of my recollection but that was a hundred years ago. (Laugh)

Mr. Misenhimer

How was the food there?

Mr. Simoneau

The food was excellent. I had no problem with the food. The only thing is that I never cared much for eggs. So when they had eggs for breakfast. Everybody flocked, everybody seemed to love eggs. The lines would be 20 miles long waiting for eggs but I never cared for eggs so I very rarely ate breakfast when they had eggs. But the food in general was pretty good.

Mr. Misenhimer

Telling me about the training. What all did you go through in the way of training?

Mr. Simoneau

First we got our hair cut right down to the bone. The training, one thing I remember very vividly and will never forget is our DI used to call us out in the mornings. The platoon that I was in was the 924. He would say, "924 outside." Then we would all run out as fast as we could and stand at attention out there. Then he would look at us and say, "When I say 924 outside, I want to see a cloud of dust. And when that dust settles, I wanted to 64

frozen statues of shit." That's what he used to tell us. Then he would send us back in again and we would just keep going in and out, in and out until we got there fast enough for him.

Mr. Misenhimer

What time of the morning was this?

Mr. Simoneau

I believe that was probably in the neighborhood of maybe 4:30 or 5:00 in the morning.

Mr. Misenhimer

What other kind of training did you get?

Mr. Simoneau

Most of the training in San Diego was what we called close order drill. Marching back and forth and back and forth. A lot of exercises, running etc. We didn't get any kind of what I would consider military type training until we got to the rifle range. That was the first time that we actually handled a weapon and started working with a weapon. Mainly this was just a lot of drilling so that you would respond as a group. Everybody responded as a group and you responded instantly to these commands. They were conditioning you to react to commands without question without hesitation. That was most boot camp. And learning the manual of arms. We did work on the manual of arms. As I recall, that was about it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was this called boot camp or basic?

Mr. Simoneau

It was called boot camp.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long was that?

Mr. Simoneau

That was 13 weeks.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you go to the rifle range as part of boot camp?

Mr. Simoneau

Yes, that was part of boot camp. That was the first time, when we went to the rifle range, that you started to be treated like a human being. Because you were not a Marine. You were a recruit, period. You were never called a Marine.

Mr. Misenhimer

Until you finished that?

Mr. Simoneau

That's right. When you finished boot camp and you went to the rifle range and then came back. You had another week or so and then finally one morning on the parade ground the DI came and gave you your globe and anchor and that was the first time you were called a Marine.

Mr. Misenhimer

Back in your boot camp, the manual of arms, what weapon did you have for that?

Mr. Simoneau

I started with the '03 rifle. I guess it was maybe about half way through the training, then we got the M - 1's.

Mr. Misenhimer

Manual of arms was parade rest and all that?

Mr. Simoneau

That's right and attention and right shoulder arms and left shoulder arms and port arms, etc. Here again, it was basically responding to commands instantly and everybody doing the exact same thing. Then getting familiar with your weapon and the feel of it. When I look back, I can now see what the point was in all of this stuff. At the time you had no idea why you were doing all of this.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you go through the obstacle course?

Mr. Simoneau

Oh yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And that was part of boot camp, right?

Mr. Simoneau

Exactly. Then we had, I believe it was a 26 or 36 mile forced march. I can't recall the exact mileage now. It was a forced march trip. Which was something like what they call the crucible nowadays. We just kept moving and moving and moving. We hardly ever stopped except in the evening when we would set up our pup tents and sleep and then continue the next day. I guess it was the final test to see if everybody could make it.

Mr. Misenhimer

In boot camp did you have any kind of bayonet training?

Mr. Simoneau

Oh yes, as a matter of fact I qualified, I have a little, we had little medals for qualifying with various pieces of equipment. It was almost like a square shaped medal and then hanging from that medal were these little bars. Each bar represented that you qualified on the M - 1, the .45 pistol, you qualified with the hand grenade, you qualified etc. So each time you qualified for one of these, you got one of these little bars for this medal.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was all of this before you went to the rifle range?

Mr. Simoneau

No, I think that was during that rifle range training. I don't recall exactly.

Mr. Misenhimer

In the obstacle course did you have to crawl on your belly while they shot live ammunition over you?

Mr. Simoneau

Oh yes. In addition to shooting live ammunition, they had little charges that went off that were fairly close to you. You would be crawling along and sometimes it would be muddy there and these little explosions would go off and the shots were being fired above you.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then you went to the rifle range. Tell me about that.

Mr. Simoneau

The rifle range was very interesting because we were starting to be treated like human beings. It was very intense training. For every two guys there was an instructor who was watching over you constantly. Initially, we did what they called "snap in". You had no

ammunition, you just aimed at a target and pulled the trigger, or squeezed the trigger as they always said. You got the feel of your personal rifle. When it actually went off. When the firing pin would snap, etc. I think we did that for a couple of days, just snapping in. Then we got ammunition and started firing it at targets.

Mr. Misenhimer

This rifle range, was this anywhere close to where you had been before?

Mr. Simoneau

I can't recall the name of the place now but I believe it was about 40 or 50 miles away from our division.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you had to go by truck or something?

Mr. Simoneau

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they have tents set up there for you or did you use your pup tents or what?

Mr. Simoneau

They had facilities all set up. They had tents set up for us.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how long were you there?

Mr. Simoneau

I would say probably maybe a week and a half or so.

Mr. Misenhimer

What distances did you fire with your rifle?

Mr. Simoneau

We fired in a number of positions. We fired in three different positions. We fired in the sitting position. No, we fired in four positions. We fired in the sitting position. We fired in the kneeling position. We fired in a prone position and we fired in the standing position. The standing positions, we didn't fire at the 500 yards, we just fired at the 100, 200 and 300 yards.

Mr. Misenhimer

And 500 was the furthest?

Mr. Simoneau

At 500 we went into the prone position.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you do there?

Mr. Simoneau

I was a sharp shooter. There were three ranges in the qualification with a rifle. There is marksman, which is the lowest. Sharp shooter is in-between and then there's expert. I think I was about 3 or 4 points below expert. There was a lot of incentive to shoot as good as you could and maybe even better than you could. There was \$5 a month extra for qualifying as expert, so everyone tried very hard. And everybody qualified. If you failed the first time around, you just kept going until you became at the very least a marksman. Because, as you probably know, every Marine is a rifleman. No matter where you started out, every Marine is a rifleman.

Mr. Misenhimer

If you missed the target what happened?

Mr. Simoneau

They had kind of an unusual, the targets if you got close to them were really huge. But when you were looking at the bull's eye, maybe it would sit right on top of the gun sight on the rifle, it just about covered that gun sight, so it looked very small. If you missed the target, or if you missed the last ring on the target, then I think they called it a "Bogie's Drawers". People down in the pits, because there was a huge pit right in front of the target and these people would paste things over the target and they would also indicate where the shots were. If you missed the target then they would wave, I think Bogie's Drawers or Pokie's Drawers or something like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

We called it Maggie's Drawers in the Army.

Mr. Simoneau

That was probably it and they would wave that back and forth indicating that you missed the target and then your instructor would maybe take a look at your sights and figured that maybe you weren't sighted in properly or whatever. The training was very intense and very, very personal, the attention.

Mr. Misenhimer

As I recall the targets when up and down and the people that worked in the pits pulled them down.

Mr. Simoneau

Yes. There were big pits back there and the targets went up and down and they would find out where you hit the target and they would cover these holes and they would run the target back up. They had some sort of thing, I don't know whether it was a big stick with

a round circle on it or something and they would point out each shot that you hit on that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you every work the target?

Mr. Simoneau

No, I never worked it.

Mr. Misenhimer

When I was in the Army, they made us work them every once in a while.

Mr. Simoneau

How interesting.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes. We would take turns firing while some of us worked in the targets. You patched the holes and they had a long pole and what we had was a round black thing on the end of that pole and you put it over wherever they had hit. That's the way we did it there.

Mr. Simoneau

My memory is fleeting so much that it's amazing, when you stop to think about it, these events changed your life and were the first time that you ever experienced any of this. It's amazing that now there is hardly any recollection anymore.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was ten years after you that I was in the Army. I've got ten years less time to forget.

(Laugh) Well, what were some other things that happened in basic or the rifle range?

Mr. Simoneau

While in basic training there we had a case of the crabs that went around quite a bit. One of the newest and strangest events was what we called "short arm inspections." Do you

know what that is?

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh yes. "Drop your drawers. Short arm inspection." (Laugh)

Mr. Simoneau

Yes, that was quite an experience. Quite a change and a lot of kidding about it, too.

(Laugh) One of the things that I came out with from all of this training was the comradeship. Everybody was concerned about you. We were all on the same boat but everybody was concerned about you. I was very apprehensive when we did some training with swimming because I was never a very good swimmer. Everyone was looking out for me. I could hear them saying, "Where's Ralph?" I never had an experience like that before where 64 guys in boot camp and everyone was concerned about everyone else.

We were a very diverse group. We had guys from every state. I found that kind of unusual that there are certain card games that are relative to a particular area. For instance, like sheephead. You've probably heard of the game sheephead. It's strictly a Midwest game and probably more in Wisconsin than anyplace else. I didn't find anyone other than the guy that I went with, Ralph Stofflet, we were on the train together from Milwaukee. He was the only guy that knew sheephead. The universal game, which I thought was kind of unusual, was pinochle. But the universal game was double-deck pinochle. I had played pinochle but I had never even heard of double-deck pinochle. But everyone that I met, whether they were from Georgia or Tennessee or New Jersey or wherever, they knew double-deck pinochle.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now the big game in Indiana is euchre and down here in Texas it is 42, which is a

domino game. How were your drill instructors?

Mr. Simoneau

As you can well imagine, we hated their guts. But when we got our globe and anchor there wasn't a man who wouldn't have followed that guy to hell and back. We finally realized what this was all about. They were very young. We didn't have a Sergeant Instructor, we had a PFC and a Corporal as our drill instructors. They were very thorough. Very demanding. But it all led to making us a Marine, the best fighting machine in the world. They did their job well.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've heard that the purpose of boot camp was to tear you down and rebuild you.

Mr. Simoneau

That is exactly it because you are really sub-human. You have never been called anything but a recruit with a lot of disdain.

Mr. Misenhimer

Your DI's, had they had combat experience?

Mr. Simoneau

The Corporal had served on an aircraft carrier. I don't recall offhand, exactly what it was, whether it was a messenger or something on an aircraft carrier.

Mr. Misenhimer

But they had not been on Guadalcanal or something like that?

Mr. Simoneau

No and we didn't socialize with them. We didn't know much about these guys. It's not like we sat around the fire at night and swapped stories. They were very aloof. I can

understand, they didn't want to get attached to anybody because they knew they were sending us out to etc. They were very detached.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, anything else that you recall from boot camp?

Mr. Simoneau

No. About the only thing that I can recall is when I graduated from boot camp. They gave us a ten day leave. I lived in Milwaukee and at the very quickest it was a three day train ride there and back. Ten days. When I got home I took 30 days. (Laugh) Luckily, just luckily I got back to San Diego without getting arrested by the shore patrol or the MP's because the trains and bus depots and everything were just jammed with MP's and SP's. So I was very fortunate or I would probably still be at Mare Island serving time had I been arrested.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you went AWOL?

Mr. Simoneau

Yes, I was kind of a rebel. I was AWOL and I was kind of a rebel, Even a couple of trips to the Brig in the Marine Corps didn't straighten me out either.

Mr. Misenhimer

So when you got back 20 days late, what did they do?

Mr. Simoneau

I got back late in the evening and I went to the guard check and the Sergeant said, "Go bunk in and we'll handle you in the morning." In the morning I reported to the Commanding Officer and they said that I would be court martialed. I got what was called

a Summary Court Martial. There are a number of different court martials. I got what was called a Summary Court Martial which is not the most serious. The General is the most serious one. It is next to the most serious one. I don't remember an awful lot about the trial but I do remember the fact and I do have it in my service record also that ultimately I was sentenced to "piss and punk", that's bread and water with full rations every fifth day. Solitary confinement. I had a \$350 fine and also three months EPD, which is Extra Police Duty. Which means that after I was out and back with the troops, instead of going to the PX or going to the movies, I was walking around the area picking up cigarette butts etc. for three months. So I didn't get any liberty or anything for that period of time.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was it worth it?

Mr. Simoneau

I guess maybe it was, I don't know. I look back at it as another experience. There is an old saying in the Marine Corps that you're not a real Marine until you have these three things: 1) A case of the clap; 2) Served time in the Brig and 3) Have served in China. I always said when I met young Marines that I had two of them but I'm not going to tell you which two. (Laugh) One guy, on the trip to Iwo Jima I had my ribbons on the sweater that I was wearing and I told this story, just as I told it to you, and he said, "You don't have a China ribbon so I know what two you had." (Laugh)

Mr. Misenhimer

Before you went on your leave, had you been assigned to a unit at that point?

Mr. Simoneau

I had volunteered, initially they asked us what we would like to get in to and one of the

choices was "Field Music." I was a musician, a trumpet player amongst several other instruments, and I said, "That sounds good, field music. I think I'll take that." Subsequently, I found out that meant bugler. I would be getting up at 3:00 in the morning and blowing my brains out, waking up everybody else. So I said, "No, I don't want that." (Laugh) Then I volunteered for the Raiders. There was a Raider battalion that was put together on the way north end of Camp Pendleton, and I volunteered for that Raider unit.

Mr. Misenhimer

And this was before you left on your leave?

Mr. Simoneau

Yes it was before I left.

Mr. Misenhimer

What Raider unit was that?

Mr. Simoneau

I don't recall but I think it was the 2nd Raider Battalion but it was not the 2nd Raider Battalion that went to Tulagi where Roosevelt's son was, I think, a Major in it. It was a Raider Battalion that had been formed.

Mr. Misenhimer

So that's what you reported to when you got back?

Mr. Simoneau

That's right, exactly. I went to the Guard Shack.

Mr. Misenhimer

And they were still there?

Mr. Simoneau

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

After you got off of your bread and water, then what happened?

Mr. Simoneau

We just went back to training and it was shortly after that the Raiders were disbanded and the 5th Division was formed. They trucked us down to the main section of Camp Pendleton. That Raider training was very interesting. I guess a fair comparison would be like the Commandoes. We were kind of supposedly an elite unit. We trained in rubber boats, rubber rafts. The idea was to get dropped off by a submarine and board these rubber rafts and go in and maybe wreck communications on an island or something, then jump in this boat again and get off the island. The training was very good. One of the things that I remember the most about the Raiders is the fact that almost every night we had night problems. We would go out and we worked together with the Paramarines. A little bit east of the Raider camp, at the north end of Camp Pendleton was where the Paramarines were training. So we would work together with them on night problems. One night they would ambush us and the next night we would ambush them and kick the hell out of each other every night. (Laugh)

Mr. Misenhimer

Now Paramarines are parachutes, right?

Mr. Simoneau

Yes, they call them the Paramarines. That was kind of interesting. We had interesting weapons. I carried a Thompson submachine gun. Most of us had Thompson submachine

guns along with .45 pistols. The training on the Thompson sub was kind of interesting too because number one, you couldn't hit the inside of a barn standing inside of it. When you started firing it, it just kept going up and up and up. Pretty soon you ended up shooting in the air. But there was a Sergeant and I believe that he was a Commando instructor, had come over from England and he taught us how to use the Thompson machine gun and the method that you used was really kind of unbelievable. He said that what you do, instead of pulling the wooden handle in front of it that you gripped (like a pistol grip), he said, "Instead of pulling on both of these, you pull on the pistol grip right by your face, but you push on that other part of the weapon" and that counteraction there for some reason didn't allow the weapon to raise up so fast and go up so high. It was a pretty effective way to handle our weapon. But your natural instincts were just to try and pull that thing into your shoulder as hard as you could. But if you stuck with that method you did pretty good with the Thompson.

Mr. Misenhimer

Because you got back 20 days late, had you missed part of the training?

Mr. Simoneau

I suppose I did but it is a lot of repetition and you are doing the same thing over and over again and there is not an awful lot of new stuff that comes in so I didn't feel like I didn't know some of the stuff that I should have known.

Mr. Misenhimer

You mentioned coming in on rubber boats, how about in the LCVP's? Did you go out on a ship and climb down the cargo net into an LCVP or anything like that?

Mr. Simoneau

We did that on wooden platforms, huge wooden platforms with a pool down below. They had the nets that you went down. We never did any training that had rubber rafts down there. As a matter of fact, the first time that we trained with the rubber rafts, I had three broken ribs. We trained from shore, and we were at St. Onofre Beach, I think it was, and we would take the rafts and run out into the water as far as we could and we tried to get beyond where the breakers were going, where the water was more still. Everyone started jumping into the raft. We learned later that President Roosevelt was upon the road in his car watching us. *(Tape side ended)*

Mr. Misenhimer

Now back up and tell me a little bit about that, they ran out there and what happened?

Mr. Simoneau

What happened is that we were supposed to run out. I think there were maybe 8 or 10 or 12 of us in this rubber raft. There was rope around it that was attached as kind of grip handles. You grabbed that and you were supposed to run out and get out as far as you could before you actually got into the raft. More often than not everybody started jumping in as soon as they got in the water. In this particular case a breaker came and it threw the raft up in the air, upside down and everybody went out and the raft came and hit me in the ribs and broke three ribs. You can recall that I was telling you how everybody looked out for everybody, the minute that thing started, that wave came and hit this thing, everybody was saying, "Where's Ralph?" They were all looking out for me. Thank God they did that because I think they probably saved my life. I might have drowned out there had they not been looking for me. I broke three ribs with that. That

didn't lay me up very long because they just taped me up and I think about three or four days later I was back doing everything.

Mr. Misenhimer

This was part of the Raiders, right?

Mr. Simoneau

Right, that was when I was still with the Raiders.

Mr. Misenhimer

What happened next?

Mr. Simoneau

Then they broke the Raiders up and we joined the 5th Division which was forming at that time. I was put in the 2nd Battalion, 27th Marines. I volunteered for a 60mm mortar section. We were attached to D Company in the 27th Marines. We trained and it was very nice because we trained separately. We were constantly setting up our weapons and aiming it, setting out the sighting stakes and aiming it. We developed a tremendous friendship with all of us because it was just 12 or 14 or 20 of us at the most who were in this section and were training everyday with them so we really grew very close. Then it wasn't too much later when we finally went over to Hawaii to Camp Tarawa in Hawaii. We just continued the same kind of training that we were doing in Pendleton.

Mr. Misenhimer

About when did you leave for Camp Tarawa? You went out there in November of 1943.

Mr. Simoneau

It was probably, I hate to even give a date because it is probably wrong but I would guess it was probably somewhere in November of 1944.

Mr. Misenhimer

So almost a year?

Mr. Simoneau

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you travel over there?

Mr. Simoneau

It was aboard what they called an APA. Actually I think they made them as cargo vessels and then they filled them up with bunks, all the way to the ceilings on these things. Some of them were 6 or 8 or even 10 high in the hold. Most everybody got seasick. I never got seasick which I suppose was understandable with the training that I got when I was aboard the ship line on the Great Lakes.

Mr. Misenhimer

The ship was pretty crowded then?

Mr. Simoneau

Oh yes. It was jammed. You couldn't spend any time down in the hold where the bunks were because it was just so hot. There was no air. It was not very good down there. Everyone possible went up on deck.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how many were onboard, do you have any idea?

Mr. Simoneau

I have no idea.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was your whole regiment onboard? More than a regiment?

Mr. Simoneau

I would say more than a regiment, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

A regiment is about 3,500?

Mr. Simoneau

Yes, probably around that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes. There are four battalions and a battalion is probably 800 or 900.

Mr. Simoneau

There were three battalions in our regiment. In the Marine Corps everything thing is three. Three battalions to a regiment and three regiments to a division.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have a headquarter battalion or something like that?

Mr. Simoneau

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was the fourth battalion.

Mr. Simoneau

Yes, I guess maybe so. We Mud Marines never thought of that.

Mr. Misenhimer

I know they called it a triangle of three. Three companies. Three battalions and all that

but usually there was a headquarters company in addition to that.

Mr. Simoneau

Yes. There were other specialty units too. When you start to go into combat then there is what they called a reinforced division that has weapons companies and etc. I guess back then a division was around 21,000 or so.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes, in that range. So you had a large number on that ship?

Mr. Simoneau

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long did it take to go over?

Mr. Simoneau

Probably a week to a week and a half.

Mr. Misenhimer

Camp Tarawa was on Hilo, right?

Mr. Simoneau

On Hawaii, the big island, right.

Mr. Misenhimer

And near Hilo the town, right?

Mr. Simoneau

Yes. Hilo was the town right up the coast. Camp Tarawa is way up on top of the island.

Mr. Misenhimer

I believe it was on the Parker Ranch, is that right?

Mr. Simoneau

That's correct.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did you do there?

Mr. Simoneau

Basically the same kind of training that we were doing at Pendleton. As I said, I was in this little mortar section and we just trained alone. Very rarely, to my recollection, were we ever involved in kind of like unit training with everybody. We had a lot more free time there also. We used to go down, as a matter of fact I rarely ate any meals at the camp. Most of us went down to Hilo to eat. You could go down to Hilo and have a steak. You could have steak and eggs for breakfast. A steak that would fill a dinner plate with probably half a dozen eggs on top of it. It was like \$1.25 or something like that. Most everyone went down there. A lot of guys went down to it because there were a lot of tattoo parlors. A lot of guys went down and got tattoos. I never did that. It was really good duty there. We were training and everything but to my recollection, we never had that thought in mind, "There is a war out there and we're going to be in it." I don't know if other guys thought that or not. I never discussed it. I think at the next reunion I'm going to discuss that with some guys to see what their thoughts were about that. It was never in the back of my mind that this was all going to end one day and we were going to be out there killing each other. I never had that thought.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were there other Marine divisions there?

Mr. Simoneau

Yes. I believe the 3rd Division was also there but I'm not certain of that. No, I think the 3rd Division was on Guam.

Mr. Misenhimer

I know a lot of the divisions would come back from combat to Camp Tarawa there to refit and retrain and all.

Mr. Simoneau

Yes, after Iwo that's where we came back to and started training for the invasion of Japan.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was there anything else there from your time at Camp Tarawa that you recall?

Mr. Simoneau

When we were finally getting ready to leave and they said that we were going to war, as it were, my little group was assigned to help load the ship. So we went down to Hilo and we stayed in Hilo and we assisted loading the ship which as I'm sure you know is a very complicated procedure. Everything that goes in first comes out last so there is quite a method. Some things have to be on the port side and others have to be on the starboard side and it's quite a thing the way they figure all this stuff out when loading a ship. But that was good duty down there loading the ship because we met other guys and palled around a little bit. They had some recreation activities. I have a certificate, I'm an official 'coconut buster'. I belong to the Coconut Busters' Club. We had a big doings. The way the natives opened up coconuts was they had a very sharp stick driven into the ground and you took that coconut and you slapped it on the top of that stick and you just kept

doing that until you broke all that stuff around the coconut, you broke it off, and when you accomplish that, the outfit that was running this little thing for us, they gave us a certificate, "You are now an official coconut buster." (Laugh) It was pretty nice. To my mind again, there wasn't any foreboding about it or anything. You were just doing your job and waited for things to happen, I guess.

Mr. Misenhimer

You said a 60mm mortar outfit?

Mr. Simoneau

Yes, a 60mm mortar outfit.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then when did you leave there then?

Mr. Simoneau

That was in probably, let's see on February 19th we hit Iwo, so it was probably maybe mid-January that we left there and headed for Iwo. We stopped at Eniwetok island first. We had a swim. We were allowed to jump off the ship and swim. Then we transferred to LST's at Eniwetok. There we climbed over the side of the ship on the rope ladders and got into Higgins boats and then they took us over to the LST's.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you loaded that ship, was that the ship you were on? Or another ship?

Mr. Simoneau

That was the ship I was on.

Mr. Misenhimer

So that ship went on without you all then?

Mr. Simoneau

Yes, exactly. Because they had our sea bags and all of our personal stuff was also on that ship.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, so you got on LST's there at Eniwetok?

Mr. Simoneau

Yes. The LST's had, in the hold, they had what we called amtraks. Those were the things that we were going to hit the beach with. The LST had these huge doors in the front and a ramp that would come down. You could just drive down that ramp out of the hold of that ship. Drive down that ramp and into the water and away you went. Most people didn't realize that these LST's could launch these amtraks out in open water. Most of them say LST's on land or their bow was on land, which they ultimately did do. They dropped their anchor out a little ways and I guess they would speed her up and go as fast as they can and hit the beach and open it up. When they were ready to leave they would put the engine in reverse and try to haul in that anchor and that pulled them off the shore. When we finally got aboard the LST's, we finally found out where we were going. We finally put a name to where we were going. They had these relief maps and models and everything. Then there the training got rather intense about where we were going to land, what our objectives were, day one, day two, etc. That was all pretty well laid out. We finally found out the other outfits that were also involved and where they were going to be landing. It pretty well narrowed down exactly what your job was and pretty much what everyone else was going to be doing.

Mr. Misenhimer

It's a long way from Eniwetok to Iwo Jima.

Mr. Simoneau

You bet you. Everybody got sick except me. With LST's, they have a very round bottom so they just rolled and rolled and pitched and rolled. We were kind of unmercifully going after some guys who got sick. They would be sitting on the deck and we would say, "Boy, I can't wait for chow. I understand that they are going to have sausages." (Laugh) They would run for the rail.

Mr. Misenhimer

That took you quite some time to get over there from Eniwetok didn't it?

Mr. Simoneau

Yes. We were aboard those LST's for quite a while. I can't tell you whether it was a week or two weeks or what. I have no recollection of that and you really had no concept of time either. You woke up in the morning and we did a lot of exercising to stay in shape. We cleaned our rifles. We worked on our mortars. We set up our mortars and worked on them and did a lot of exercising. We would go back to the maps and everything and they would lay out what we were supposed to do. That was pretty much the routine every day that we did. Really, I had absolutely no concept of time and I'm sure no one else did either because it was just wake up and do this and go to sleep and wake up and do the same thing over and over again. I didn't know what day of the week it was, I didn't know the date or anything. It really wasn't important. We'll get to where we are going whenever we get there and that's it, you know?

Mr. Misenhimer

About how many were aboard this LST?

Mr. Simoneau

I would say there were probably about 2,500.

Mr. Misenhimer

2,500 aboard this one LST? That would be pretty full.

Mr. Simoneau

I really have no idea. There were probably about 30 or 40 amtraks aboard that thing. In our amtrak we had maybe 22 or 25 guys aboard our amtrak.

Mr. Misenhimer

And how many amtraks then?

Mr. Simoneau

I would say probably 30 or 40.

Mr. Misenhimer

So that would be 750 or 1,000, okay.

Mr. Simoneau

That would probably be closer to it. That was kind of disconcerting in a way. When they finally announced to load the amtraks, you got in that thing and we never had any experience in this actual operation, doing this. When that amtrak got on that ramp, the angle of that ramp was really steep. I thought that amtrak was going to tip over, the angle was so steep on that ramp going down into the water. When we hit the water, half of that amtrak was underwater before it bobbed up. Then we circled around out there for, it seemed like forever that we were circling. The battle ships and the cruisers and there

were LST's that had these rocket launchers all over their deck. The noise and the smell was just absolutely unbelievable. We were just going around in a circle and a circle. It was really disconcerting. One thing that I will remember until the day that I die, and I don't recall who it was, it was some Sergeant in our outfit but it wasn't the Sergeant of our mortar section, but it was some Sergeant there that said, "If anybody says this is it, I'm going to kick their ass." (Laugh) Like I say, that was kind of disconcerting. You were all primed and ready to go and you kind of thought when you hit the water that you were going to start going but you just kept going in this circle until all of these amtraks and all of the vessels that were going to make the attack were all in position. Finally you ended up in a big skirmish line, you might say, and then all the vessels started heading for the beach. It was, like I say, disconcerting. I don't want to sound like a big hero but I was never really frightened. The only time where maybe something that you could call frightened was when we actually hit that beach and the amtrak kind of jerked back and forth. It went up the sand a little bit. We were waiting because these amtraks, as you know, the back ramp came down. The ramp was supposed to come down and it didn't come down. Mortar shells and artillery shells were starting to coming in and even some small arms fire, not an awful lot. I was in the first wave and there wasn't an awful lot of it. It wasn't until about the fifth or sixth wave that they really started opening up on the beach. Nonetheless, the stuff was coming in and we were in this damn amtrak and that ramp wasn't down. Somebody finally said, "Let's get the hell out of here." I don't know if you've ever been in a WWII amtrak but if you are standing in it, your shoulders are just about even with the top of that thing, so you're down quite far into that thing. Getting out of that was quite a chore, particularly the mortar men because we had a canvas vest

that held about, I think it was, four rounds in the front and four rounds in the back, plus your other tack and your rifle and other gear that you are carrying. It was quite a job getting out of that thing and quite a drop down. Once you got on the top of that thing and then you dropped down to the sand, it was quite a drop down. I'm surprised more guys didn't break their legs or anything. That was really kind of unnerving to be caught there. Because at least if you can dig in a little bit or lay prone you can feel safe. But when you are standing in this coffin, as it were, it was a little scary.

Mr. Misenhimer

What happened with the ramp? Did something go wrong with it?

Mr. Simoneau

Apparently something I never knew. We never saw that ramp go down and we got out of it and we started heading up that beach and that was it. I never looked back or anything. We just kept going.

Mr. Misenhimer

Who had your mortar tube and your tripod and all that.

Mr. Simoneau

I was an ammunition carrier. The gunner carried a sight that fastened on it. The assistant gunner carried the tube and then another guy carried the base plate and another guy carried the bipod. The rest of us in the squad were ammunition carriers. We protected the gun when it was firing and also we assisted in digging a hole for the mortar.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how many were in your squad?

Mr. Simoneau

I think there were about 7 or 8 in our squad. I've got pictures. Are you interested in any kind of documentation?

Mr. Simoneau

Oh sure, yes, anything you have, right.

Mr. Simoneau

I'll send you some pictures. Right now I'm putting together a package for the guys up at Quantico at the college there. I'm putting together a package for them and I'll make a couple extra copies for you. One other thing Richard, would you be interested in the DVD that they sent me?

Mr. Misenhimer

Sure.

Mr. Simoneau

In Raleigh, I think it is about an hour and 30 minutes or so, they interviewed me and about a week or so ago, I got the DVD. I can send you a copy of that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Good. Okay, now you're on the beach there at Iwo and you got out of your amtrak and then what happened?

Mr. Simoneau

Our objective, on Day One we were supposed to completely cross the island. We were at the narrowest part of the island. The 28th Marines were to our left and that is the outfit that went up Mt. Suribachi. I was with the 27th Marines. Both of our objectives, the 28th and the 27th, was to completely cross the island. We were to turn north, which would be

right and the 28th Marines were to turn south, which would be to the left and take Suribachi. I think we probably got, if memory serves me right, I think we almost made it completely across the island. We did stay the first night, we were just south of Yamamoto Airfield # 1 which was the biggest airfield. We dug in and there was quite an artillery and mortar attack when we started digging in. As a matter of fact, I think we lost a couple of guys in our little section that day. We lost them because they didn't do what they should have done. They didn't do what we were trained to do. As soon as you get to a position, you start digging in and you get in your hole and you stay there until the Sergeant or somebody tells you to do something else. We were digging in a little bit and this artillery and stuff started coming in. These guys were standing around shooting the shit and they paid the price for it.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that sand? I understand the sand was awfully hard to get around in.

Mr. Simoneau

The sand was like quicksand because it's not really sand. It's called sand, but it's not really sand. What it is, is volcanic ash and it's black and sharp. The old saying about taking one step forward and two steps backwards is basically the truth because you couldn't dig in it. It just kept filling itself in. It's not like sand you see on the beach. It is very dry and it's volcanic ash. That was very difficult. Once we got on the top of the island, the high point of the island as far as that area where we were, then you were dealing with dirt. It was dirt up there, it wasn't sand. But on the beach itself, that was very, very difficult. As a matter of fact on the 50th anniversary, I went back to Iwo Jima and the question I received the most from all the of the young Marines that were there

was, "How did you make it up this beach." They were just absolutely amazed that we could make it off of that beach because it was like quicksand.

Mr. Misenhimer

The first night that you dug in, you were out of the sand then?

Mr. Simoneau

Yes, we were out of the sand.

Mr. Misenhimer

Had you been firing your mortar at all at that point?

Mr. Simoneau

At that point, no. We set up the mortar and we fired it the first night. We were shooting off flares. As it really turned out, the 60mm mortar was almost useless other than just sending up flares at night, because of the terrain and caves. The terrain was just not conducive to that small of a mortar. The 90mm mortar and artillery, that was fine, but this little mortar was fairly useless. The funny thing is, combat is not like you see on the movies a lot where you are face to face and the enemy is here and you are standing there. I don't believe that I saw, other than dead, I don't believe that I saw more than a dozen live Japanese in the 35 or 36 days that I was on that island. So, you are shooting at shadows. You are shooting at noise. You just don't see your enemy. You don't see a concentration of them because basically that's what artillery is for, whether it is mortars or the big artillery. It is to shoot at concentrations of troops. That's why it was so important to get Suribachi because they had observation points up there and they had the island all graphed over where they could say, "Lay in the artillery in section G-7." With the terrain the way it was for us and not having observation points like that, those

weapons just weren't effective.

Mr. Misenhimer

And they were dug in so much on Iwo Jima with all those caves and tunnels.

Mr. Simoneau

Yes. Some of the caves were seven stories deep. They were digging this for years and years.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've forgotten how many miles, 16 miles or something like that.

Mr. Simoneau

Yes. I think it was 27 miles or something. It was just unbelievable.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what happened?

Mr. Simoneau

I would just to like to get back to this fear thing. Some guys say that if you are not afraid, you must be nuts or something or you are lying. The way I looked at it, you are trained to do your job. You know your job so well. You are focused so well on doing your job that there is not room for anything else. It's just like a kid that is maybe in high school and is going to take an exam. The kid that really knows his subject is not going to be afraid to take that exam. The guy that doesn't know it, he is going to be as scared as hell and he's not going to want to take that exam. My feeling is that is the way I felt in combat. I was so well trained, I was so sure of what I was doing and what I was going to do that there just wasn't room for anything else. There were guys that were just frightened out of their wits, that they would sit in that foxhole and they would just be trembling like they were

freezing. Some of them even, like almost deserted. They would not stay in this particular area. They would go back to where they felt was safer. I don't know. I always had kind of mixed feelings about that. At the time, I guess I couldn't accept the fact that someone could have a psychological or mental grasp on these things that they just couldn't handle things. In later years I understand it. He wasn't a coward, he just couldn't handle it. I never felt that. Like I say, I was trained so great and I had so much confidence in what I was doing that there just wasn't room for anything else.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were these people a little older that were frightened, or were they your age?

Mr. Simoneau

I think they were my age. We didn't have too many older guys in our unit. Sergeant Beals was the oldest guy. He served aboard, as a matter of fact he served aboard the *Yorktown* when it went down.

Mr. Misenhimer

The second day, what happened.

Mr. Simoneau

The second day we completed cutting the island in two and started turning north. We actually turned into like a rifle platoon because as I say the mortars were not very useful. We dug them in every time we stopped and we set them up and maybe fired a few rounds. But basically we couldn't find any targets to shoot at so there was no sense in shooting at stuff. By this time, those of us that were carrying ammunition were dumping that because it was useless. We did have some flares and that's what we would send up at night and that was a big mistake because at night all you did was make the shadows

deeper and blacker. If you happened to look up at that thing, then you were blind for about five or six minutes. I was not happy shooting those flares up in the air. But we moved and as I said before, you didn't see your enemy. It was just going and you would take fire from caves and what have you, but you never saw anybody. You never had anybody in your sights. It was completely different that what you ever imagined that combat would be like. When you look at the American Revolution, where you had the British marching in a straight line and we were marching in a straight line and that was kind of your concept of what combat would be like but it was just completely different. I would add at this point here, never was my objective killing. All our training, I never got any kind of training where they said, "You have to kill. This is what our job is, killing." I never had that feeling. Our job was to go from Point A to Point B and your adversary or the enemy did not want you to go from Point A to Point B so he tried to stop you. Because of that people were killed or wounded but that was not the objective. The objective was to get somewhere. I can remember very vividly when I went to a reunion they had in Washington, D.C. for all of the services that were involved in the Iwo Jima battle. That was in the year 2000. On the last day I was sitting in the hotel lunch room and I recognized a guy that was also there for the reunion. He was sitting at another table with his wife, quite close to me. I just went over to him and I said, "Did you go back to Iwo on the 50th anniversary in 1995?" He said, "Why the hell would I want to go back there to see those damn Japs." I said to him, "You know, a number of years ago I came to grips with that. At my point in life, I don't want to have hatred in my heart when I stand before my maker. I'm getting closer and closer to the time where I am going to have to stand before my maker and I don't want that hatred in my heart." I said, "I don't love the

Japanese but I don't hate them." I said, "If I were you, I would start changing your attitude. We're all getting closer and closer to that day where we will have the final accounting." As I thought more about this, the thing was never about killing. It may have been for somebody but I don't know because I never discussed it with any other Marine. For me, it never seemed to be about that. It was just, this is what your job is. You have to do this. You have to fire this weapon. You got very good at firing this etc. I never carried a score card. I don't know if you ever heard this from any of the other guys you talked to. I feel very strongly about that. I'm 82 years old and we have WWII veterans dying at the rate of 1,700 a day. It could be my time tomorrow. Do I want this hatred in my heart? No.

Mr. Misenhimer

I think the war was a little more personal in some ways in Europe.

Mr. Simoneau

Oh yes, definitely.

Mr. Misenhimer

Because you were more one on one over there.

Mr. Simoneau

Yes, exactly.

Mr. Misenhimer

They were not as hidden as much like the Japanese were.

Mr. Simoneau

I kind of felt like, in particular in view of my experience on Iwo, where we were not seeing any enemy. It was kind of like an aviator in a bomber. He's 20,000 feet up there and he is dropping bombs and he doesn't see anything. He doesn't even know what's

happening to the stuff that he is dropping there. So you can be really detached from it and not carry any scars. I don't carry any scars from that. A lot of people can't quite understand that, that you can go through this and not have these scars.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what happened?

Mr. Simoneau

We just kept going. I suppose that the most scary thing other than that episode on the beach when the ramp wouldn't go down was either the third or fourth night. We had dug in and, as you probably know, there was no water on Iwo Jima. There was on the east side of the island. There was a plant on a very small island that distilled salt water and turned it into fresh water, the Japanese had built it. But during the bombing and all that, that was destroyed. So the only water that they had was water that they had brought from Japan and they had in the cave. So almost every night we had the Japanese infiltrating, trying to get water. This one night and I don't remember whether I was sleeping first or if my buddy was sleeping first. One thing at night, you never leave your foxhole. You never stand up and you never leave your foxhole because if you do, everyone is going to start shooting. We heard some noise or my buddy heard some noise and he started shooting. That woke me up and I started shooting. A Japanese fell into our foxhole. He had an affixed bayonet on his rifle and he caught my buddy in the shoulder. Through the shoulder with that bayonet. In the morning, when we could see, there were five dead Japanese around our foxhole. I don't know who shot how many or whatever but there were five of them around our foxhole that were trying to infiltrate to try and get water. That was the closest experience that I had with hand-to-hand, if you will, combat. One on

one with the Japanese. Otherwise, as I said before, you are shooting at movement or at noise or at whatever. We just kept going up and up the island. As you know from reading any of the history, the battle was very tough because of the terrain and the concealment of the Japanese. It was just a tough struggle all the way up until we got to the end of the island. We were about, I would say, we were about maybe 200 to 300 yards from the actual end of the island. The north end of the island was fairly high. I would imagine the beach was probably in the neighborhood of 200 feet down from the cliffs on that north end of the island. One of the things that I really feel bad about happened on I think it was the last day. There was a Japanese. We were in kind of like a skirmish line and there was a little bluff right in front of us that made a very good platform. You could lay in a prone position and rest our rifle on top of this little ridge and fire from that position. A Japanese jumped up out of a hole and started running. All of us fell down in the prone position and put our rifles on this little ridge and started shooting. Somebody said that the Japanese probably weighed 50 pounds more now because he much have had 50 pounds of lead in his back because everybody was shooting at him. It was just unbelievable the number of rifle shots going on. We all kind of chuckled about that. Kind of laughed about it. But as I look back it, I feel ashamed of doing that, of making fun of that. We had to kill him but what we made of it was really sad. The few Japanese that were left were starting to jump off the cliffs and land down on the rocks on the beach down there because their culture is that you don't give up. They don't surrender. Death is better than surrender. They knew it was all over and they started jumping off the cliffs there. So that was it. Very shortly after that, when there was no island left they collected us all and said, "March back down and board ship and let's get the hell out of here."

Mr. Misenhimer

I'm looking at a map of Iwo Jima here and it shows where the 27th Marines went in and you were going up north. I see place called, it's a primary defense zone, "Hill 362A" near the town of Mishi. Did you get to that?

Mr. Simoneau

Oh yes. We didn't know the names of these things when we were doing this because we didn't have maps. Maybe our Lieutenant had a map. By the time the third or fourth day came, we were now a rifle platoon and we were just going straight ahead. We didn't get any orders from anybody. We were just going straight ahead. That was our thing. When we got a lot of artillery fire and mortar fire or small arms fire we would kind of dig in, etc. I know that there are a lot of points on Iwo that had different names etc. but at the time I knew nothing about things like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Mishi is a small town, a little village apparently.

Mr. Simoneau

Yes. We didn't see any civilians. To our knowledge, I guess there were a few Japanese, but more Korean, almost prisoners, slaves, laborers that the Japanese had. There was some mining there. They did mine the sulphur there and that was about it. We saw very few shrubbery or trees. As a matter of fact, I don't recall even seeing a tree on the island. I saw no houses. No shanties of any kind or anything like that. I'm sure there was some of that there because we did see some Korean laborers there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did your squad or your unit take quite a few casualties?

Mr. Simoneau

For the size of our unit, yes. When I send you what I have, which is a very rare but important document, I have a roster for D Company, 27th Marines that Buck Stidham, who was the Company Sergeant and who kept this record in his own handwriting. He kept a record of all of the people in D Company and what happened to them. Wounded in action. Killed in action. Whether they were evac'd or if they came back after they were wounded, etc. This is all in his own handwriting. I think in our little section we had 4 or 5 killed in action and maybe 6 or so wounded in action. For the size of our unit we took quite a few casualties.

Mr. Misenhimer

I know the Marines on Iwo Jima took an awful lot of casualties. Over 6,000 killed.

Mr. Simoneau

6,000 and really closer to 7,000. I think somewhere around 20,000 wounded. I told my wife, I recorded all of Burn's WWII and we watched episode one and two yesterday. They were talking about Guadalcanal. They were saying that the battle at Guadalcanal was really a terrible battle and it lasted over six months. There were over 1,200 killed. I told my wife, "We were on Iwo for 35 days and we had almost 7,000 killed. You can see the difference between one battle and the other."

Mr. Misenhimer

That's right. Now you got to the end of the island and that was the end of the battle there, right?

Mr. Simoneau

Yes, right, exactly. We headed back aboard ship and went back to Hawaii and back to

Camp Tarawa and started training again. It was the same old thing. Getting ready. Of course now we knew what our objective was. Then it came over the news that the atomic bomb was dropped and then another atomic bomb. (*Tape side ended*)

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, so you got the news about the bomb?

Mr. Simoneau

Yes and of course, we were very happy because now we knew we were all going to survive. Then the word came out that we were going to go to Japan and occupy Japan and disarm them. They gave us some Japanese language booklets where it had the interpretation of what the Japanese characters meant and how it was pronounced and then in English. We were all kind of studying that so that we could at least converse with the people there. We got aboard ship and headed for Japan. We were near Sasebo when we went by the battleship *Missouri* and they were signing the armistice. At that particular moment they were signing the armistice on the battleship *Missouri*. We landed in Sasebo which was a big naval base there. Also there was an armament factory. For a couple of days my little unit was guarding one of these armament factories. Several days later we were assigned, at that particular time, they put us into, I can't recall now if it was the 2nd Marine Division or the 3rd Marine Division. They disbanded the 5th Marine Division and put us into either the 2nd or 3rd Marine Division. Then after we guarded for a few days these warehouses we started on a march up to a city called Saga, Japan. When we got there I volunteered for an MP unit because I was always one to look at things and see what was best for Ralph. (Laugh) I thought this MP unit might be just my ticket. So I volunteered for this MP unit and we took over the police station in the center of Saga. I

have a picture of the MP unit in front of that Saga police station. If you are interested, I will send you a copy of that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Sure, that would be fine.

Mr. Simoneau

I also have a picture of my boot camp crew.

Mr. Misenhimer

We like all of those things. Whatever you have.

Mr. Simoneau

How about a dogtag?

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you want to keep that or not?

Mr. Simoneau

For some reason, I have a whole bunch of them.

Mr. Misenhimer

Well, sure.

Mr. Simoneau

I'll send you a dogtag. So I joined this MP unit and we worked very closely with the Japanese police because at that particular point in time the people had more respect and they were more apt to follow the Japanese police orders than they were us. The Japanese were extremely cooperative. I felt no animosity from these people. As a matter of fact there was one family subsequently that befriended me and I had meals at their house. We became, I guess, as much friends as you can become with someone who was your enemy

not too long ago. It was a very rewarding experience. It gave me an insight that many other people didn't get about the Japanese culture and the Japanese people. We patrolled the streets. Our biggest job was keeping the guys out of the whorehouses. Finally the Brass decided that the only way we could keep them out of the whorehouses was to open up some of them. They sent in a batch of doctors and they cleaned up a bunch of these gals and they said that "This place here, and this place here, and this place here - you can go in there and do whatever you want to do." Then they had what we called 'pro-stations' set around where you would go in and clean yourself up and give yourself a prophylactic that prevented any diseases etc. That lasted almost the full time that I was in Japan until the word got back home and some of the do-gooders back here thought that was absolutely terrible and they had to close these places down. MP duty was very good because I drove around in a jeep with another guy. We got to see quite a bit of the Japanese countryside and the town. It was very interesting and it certainly added to my knowledge about the country and the people. After about three or four months in Japan, a bunch of the guys that I was with all the time were going home because they started this point system. If you had x number of points, you got so many points for U.S. duty and so many points for overseas duty and so many points for combat duty and if it added up to a certain number you got sent home. All my guys were going home and I said, "What the hell is going on here? How come I'm still here?" So I went to the Company Commander and I asked him, "Sir, why am I still here and everybody else is going home?" He got out my service record and he said, "Let's see Simoneau, you spent 30 days in the Brig here. So that's x number of points that you lost. You spent 15 days in the Brig here and that's x number of points that you lost. You spent 15 days in the Brig here and that's x number of

points so it'll be a while before you go home." (Laugh) So, I spent eleven months in Japan.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were patrolling did you carry a weapon with you?

Mr. Simoneau

Yes. We just carried pistols. We had .45 pistols and we had a long night stick. It must have been about three feet long. Fortunately I was paired up with a guy by the name of Rosenberg that was about 6' 4" and weight probably 200. He looked like a big linebacker or a lineman for the Green Bay Packers. He reveled in brutality. He loved brutality. When I was driving, the Japanese were all on bicycles. They were either on bicycles or they were walking. As we were driving along he would stick out this night stick and hit people riding bicycles in the back of the head. I don't know what was with this guy. I was never able to get inside his head to find out what was wrong with him. Finally after a couple of months I went to the Provost Marshall and asked to get a different partner . He was Jewish so I said that there were religious differences that we can't seem to settle. That was the excuse that I used so that I would not be with this guy anymore because I just couldn't understand or deal with his brutality. Other than that, this MP duty I found to be very rewarding and very interesting. It was better than a lot guys. They were digging in caves and what have you and looking for ammunition or whatever. So it was a lot cleaner duty.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you see any of the military age Japanese people?

Mr. Simoneau

Very few. Every once in a while you would see some. The funny thing is, if there was a small group of them, when we went by in this jeep they would turn their backs on us. I don't know what that was all about. They didn't show, to my way of thinking, they didn't show us any disrespect or anything. Maybe that was part of their culture. I really don't know. You could tell them because they had these stupid military hats that they wore and a lot of times their legs were wrapped. We had those Puttees, I think they called them, canvas things, but they would wrap almost a 2 ½ inch or 3 inch cloth tape they would wrap around. So you knew they were military. As soon as would drive by and if there were three or four of them walking together, they would just turn around and not face us.

Mr. Misenhimer

I wonder if that was part of their being embarrassed maybe.

Mr. Simoneau

That might be. I never tried to analyze it. I just looked at it and I didn't take any offense to it at all. A couple of days before we got to Japan we had some officers telling us about the culture difference. We shouldn't be surprised. The culture differences were really incredible. It would be nothing different to see a woman stop alongside the road, even in town, and lift up her kimono and take a leak right there in the road and the guys were doing the same thing. This was going on and it was just amazing. They were telling us all this aboard ship. "Their culture is completely different and you are going to see things that are going to shock you but this is their normal way of living." It was a tremendous experience. As a matter of fact, when I look back on it, I'm glad I spent the extra time there because I got to travel. I went to Karatsu, Japan which is like the Riviera of Japan.

They had fantastic hotels there and baths and things like this. I never got up to Tokyo. We never went that far. We pretty much stayed on the island of Kyushu. I did get to Nagasaki and Hiroshima and saw the damage there.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did they look?

Mr. Simoneau

It is really amazing that stuff survived. You would see a light pole sticking up. There would be complete devastation for a mile around but this one light pole would be sticking up or one building would be completely untouched. It was hard to fathom that something like this could happen. That you could have this complete devastation with nothing standing for a mile around but this thing is standing there. I never saw any people. When we were in Sasebo guarding this warehouse there was an old janitor who worked in this warehouse and he was hanging around all the time. We asked him, "Did you know when the bombs went off in Hiroshima?" In very broken English he said, "When the bomb went off in Hiroshima, Saga shook like hell." That was probably 50 to 100 miles away.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about damage in other towns? Were most of those damaged also?

Mr. Simoneau

Saga was a very small town and I didn't see any damage there. Sasebo, everything near the water was pretty well destroyed. It was a big naval training base and there were a lot of barracks there and everything there was very severely damaged. Saga and Karatsu, where the resort was, there was no damage there.

Mr. Misenhimer

So the bigger cities mainly?

Mr. Simoneau

Yes, the bigger cities. I imagine Tokyo was bad. I wish I would have gotten to Tokyo. They did that fire bombing there and Japanese houses were mostly all paper. It must have been a firestorm in that place when they bombed Tokyo.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes, I've talked to several people flying B-29's and they would be up about 10,000 to 12,000 feet and they said that the thermal was so bad that it liked to have flipped the B-29's on their backs.

Mr. Simoneau

It must have been incredible. That's about it Richard. When I finally got out of there, we boarded ship and we went above the Hawaiian Islands. We left Japan and went above the Hawaiian Islands. They had a big map in one of the ward rooms there and you could follow the progress of where we were going. We stopped and the ship anchored about two miles off of San Francisco Harbor. We got more provisions, food and what have you and all of the guys that lived west of the Mississippi got off there because they were being discharged at San Diego. Those of us who lived east of the Mississippi we were going to be discharged at Great Lakes, Illinois. So what they did was drop these guys off and restocked everything. Then we went all the way down the coast, through the Panama Canal, around up to Norfolk, Virginia. We got on trains in Norfolk, Virginia, cattle trains is what they were. We got on cattle trains and went to Great Lakes, Illinois. We got discharged at Great Lakes, Illinois. When I got to Great Lakes, to show you the stupidity

of our government, when we got to Great Lakes my sea bag was missing. The Lieutenant came over and he said, "Simoneau, you go over to the supply depot there and they will take care of you." I said, "I don't need anything." We were going to be here for medical exams and they told us how civilian life was going to be all this stuff. I said, "I don't need anything. What I am wearing is fine. I live 90 miles from here." He said, "No. You go over to supplies." So they issued me everything I got the day I went into the Marine Corps. I got six skivvy drawers, six skivvy shirts, nine pair of socks. They issued me everything brand new that I got when I went into the Marine Corps. I took that home and about a week after I got home United Express came with my sea bag. (Laugh)

Mr. Misenhimer

What date were you discharged?

Mr. Simoneau

I think it was July of 1946.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've got several questions. Did you get home with any souvenirs?

Mr. Simoneau

Yes. When I was in Japan, I sent home a 25 caliber sniper's rifle. I sent that to my dad. I also sent home a Samurai sword. I had, which I carried home with me, a Hari Kari knife. I had a Japanese flag that I took off of a dead Japanese on Iwo Jima. When I made the 50th anniversary trip back to Iwo Jima, and I have some pictures of that too that I'll send to you. Kuribayashi, who was the commanding General at Iwo Jima, at the 50th anniversary thing at Iwo Jima, she was there. At the hotel before we left, General Snowden who was one of the organizers, and probably gets a free trip every year, said

that we may have an opportunity to say something. I said, "I've got this flag and I would like to return it." These war souvenirs, Richard, they mean something when you pick them up but 20 years later, 50 years later, they don't mean anything. You haven't even looked at them since you got them. So I kept thinking of that and my brother in law mentioned it to me too, he said, "Ralph, why don't you return that thing? That flag means a lot more to them than it does to you." I thought that was a good idea so when I got to Iwo Jima after the big ceremony at that monument there, I went up to her, and there was a female Marine interpreter and so I said to her, "I would like to return this flag." I gave the flag back to Mrs. Kuribayashi. You can see in the three pictures, one that I took and two that a buddy of mine took and gave me copies of, you can see from the look on her face that this really meant a great deal to her getting this flag. This Marine interpreter, you can just kind of see her to the side, was telling her that I took this flag off of a dead soldier and that I wanted to return it to her because I knew that it meant more to her than it did to me.

Mr. Misenhimer

This flag, did it have any writing on it or anything?

Mr. Simoneau

No, there was no writing on it.

Mr. Misenhimer

I know that on some of them, the families had signed them.

Mr. Simoneau

Exactly. I did have this Samurai sword and if you take the handle off there writing on the tang of this thing. I can't recall the circumstances but I had someone, there was a

Japanese something going on down in Milwaukee at one of the conventions there. I took this thing there and this guy, I don't recall now, but he was telling me the dynasty and who the maker of this sword was and everything. These things are hundreds of years old and they are passed down from generation to generation.

On this 50th anniversary trip, I didn't get to the top of Suribachi which really angered me. What happened there is that they had a whole bunch of trucks that were trucking us to the top of Suribachi. We got about half way up and there was a Marine Captain standing on the road there and he motioned to the truck to stop and pull over. He said, "There will be no more trucks going to the top of Suribachi." So the truck driver pulled off the road as far as he could and then here came a parade of white Japanese Toyota station wagons up there and it was full of Japanese officials, Japanese reporters, TV cameras, etc. We finally asked the Captain what was going on. He said, "They're holding a big ceremony and we can't go up there anymore." So the truck turned around and went back down. I never got to the top of Suribachi. This happened to a number of other guys too. They were in this big hangar and one of them was brazen enough to walk up to a Marine General and say that there were a whole bunch of guys that didn't get up there and he commandeered a couple of trucks and sent them up there but I wasn't around at the time so I didn't get to go. It was almost dark by that time. There were a few guys that went up there and that was it.

Another thing, they confiscated our passports in Guam, the Japanese. They didn't return them until we got back to Guam. I don't know whether they thought we were going to stay in Iwo forever or what the hell was going on. In addition, the night before they said our boarding passes, the Japanese officials said that our boarding passes were

not good and that the Military Historical Tours had to redo all of these boarding passes. They seemed to be doing everything they could to make it difficult for us. I came away from that reunion with kind of a sour taste in my mouth. As a matter of fact, I even wrote a letter to the Commandant and told him about it and said that he was partly responsible for this because the guy in charge is always responsible. He never had the courtesy to answer me which also angered me because I'm sure there were enough flunkies around the Commandant that he could have told them, "Write this a**hole a letter and tell him to take a hike or something", but he never responded. I have a copy of this letter and I also have a copy of something I wrote called "50 Plus Years - Return to Iwo Jima." If you're interested in that, I'll send you that too.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes. Anything you have, if you don't mind.

Mr. Simoneau

It gives my thoughts and observations about going back there.

Mr. Misenhimer

All of this will go in the archives at the museum so we'll have all of that for people to look at. You know, that's one reason why I told you that I'm not sure I want to go back to Iwo because I've heard that so many times. Also, there is only one time of year that they can go.

Mr. Simoneau

Yes, it's sometime in March or February.

Mr. Misenhimer

There's only one time a year they can go and its not very long and I understand that they

are not real hospitable.

Mr. Simoneau

What made me the most angry in that whole Iwo Jima trip is when we were aboard the airplane and we had just landed. There was a guy at the banquet at the night before in Guam, he gave little American flags to everybody in there. They were the kind maybe about 1 ½ foot wide and 2 feet long. You've seen them in cemeteries. He gave one to each of us. I was wearing a backpack when I got off the plane and I had it stuck in that backpack. We just got off the plane and a Lieutenant came up to me and said, "There will be no celebrating here." I said, "What do you mean celebrating?" He said, "We don't want any flag waving or any kind of that stuff." I said, "Listen Lieutenant (and I guess I was very rude), I've got buddies that died here and I've got buddies that their blood is here. If I want to celebrate, I'm going to celebrate. Not you or anybody else is going to stop me." Apparently they made a deal with the Japanese that we would not act like the victors. There was a number of things about that trip, I'm glad I made it, but there were a number of things that left a very bad taste in my mouth.

Mr. Misenhimer

The Japanese are not happy to let us go there. Another question, did you ever see any USO shows?

Mr. Simoneau

Oh yes. A lot of USO shows. On Hawaii we saw a lot of USO shows. I never saw Bob Hope or any of the major entertainers but I did see Ray Anthony's Orchestra, which was really big back then. When we were in California I went to the Hollywood Canteen. I danced with Heddy Lamar. You could name every movie star that there was around in

the late 1930's and early 1940's and they were in this Hollywood Canteen giving you coffee and donuts and talking with us. That was quite an experience for a young guy that came from the Midwest.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were overseas could you get your mail with any regularity?

Mr. Simoneau

Oh yes, absolutely.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about on Iwo?

Mr. Simoneau

On Iwo, no. We had no mail on Iwo.

Mr. Misenhimer

And when you were in Japan afterwards, you could get it there, right?

Mr. Simoneau

We got it there, right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose?

Mr. Simoneau

I never heard Tokyo Rose. I heard of her but I never actually heard her.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you did not cross the equator?

Mr. Simoneau

No. We did cross the international date line

Mr. Misenhimer

When you crossed the date line did anything happen there?

Mr. Simoneau

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

On April 12, 1945, President Roosevelt died, I'm assuming you were at Camp Tarawa?

Mr. Simoneau

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of reaction did people have when they heard about that?

Mr. Simoneau

It was devastating to us. I think he was probably the most liked President that we ever had by most everyone. That was really devastating. I don't think there was a dry eye in the camp at that time.

Mr. Misenhimer

He was the only President that most people had known.

Mr. Simoneau

Exactly.

Mr. Misenhimer

On May 8, 1945, Germany surrendered. Did you all hear about that?

Mr. Simoneau

Oh yes, absolutely.

Mr. Misenhimer

Any kind of a celebration?

Mr. Simoneau

No, I don't recall any kind of celebration at all.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then of course when the first atomic bomb was dropped, did you hear about that?

Mr. Simoneau

Yes, absolutely, there was a big celebration then.

Mr. Misenhimer

When Japan surrendered on August 15th, you probably had a big celebration then.

Mr. Simoneau

Oh yes, absolutely. I just thank God and Harry Truman. Historians, now as time passes on, are saying that he was one of the really great Presidents. Not just for us decision about that bomb but starting the Marshall Plan that saved Germany and Japan.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you know, he had one of the lowest approval ratings at one time.

Mr. Simoneau

Yes. He was a haberdasher. To follow a man like Franklin Roosevelt, you had two strikes against you right off the bat.

Mr. Misenhimer

What ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. Simoneau

I don't know if I mentioned it but I'm not a big believer in medals simply because of my

personal knowledge of people that got medals that really didn't deserve them. In other words, I know an individual who cut himself with a C-ration can and got a Purple Heart. I know a guy that got burned by his own flame thrower that got a Purple Heart. I find it difficult, because as you know, in order for you to get a medal, somebody has to see the event that happened and pass it on and then someone makes a judgment that, yes, this is worth a medal. When you have medals, behind door number one is this medal, behind door number two is this medal. Other than a Medal of Honor where a guy throws himself on a hand grenade, I can understand that, but all the rest of this stuff, I'm sorry but I think it cheapens. The thing that I am proudest of when it comes to a medal is the Presidential Unit Citation. The 27th Marines have a Presidential Unit Citation because there the President of the United States says, "This outfit really did something." But to single out individuals and say, "This guy was so brave." I have a lot of difficulty in dealing with that so I just don't put a lot of faith in medals. If that offends somebody, I'm very sorry about that but that's the way I feel about it.

Mr. Misenhimer

A lot of people that really earned them never got them because no one could vouch for it.

Mr. Simoneau

Exactly. I get the Leatherneck Magazine and it turns my stomach and also sometimes in a local paper you will see, "This guy has been trying to get the Bronze Star he deserves for 50 years." Is this what combat is all about? Collecting medals so you get special recognition? Is that what it's all about? Or is it just doing your job and shutting your face and going on with life? I can't deal with that stuff at all. I'm sure I offend a lot of people when I say stuff like that but that's the way I feel about it.

Mr. Misenhimer

What Battle Stars did you get?

Mr. Simoneau

Just the Iwo Jima.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do the Marines have what they called a Combat Infantryman's Badge?

Mr. Simoneau

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Are you familiar with that?

Mr. Simoneau

Yes. I think that was after World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer

No, it was World War II.

Mr. Simoneau

Okay.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got out, did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. Simoneau

No. I'm very adaptable.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you use your GI Bill for anything?

Mr. Simoneau

Yes I did. I went to Milwaukee State Teacher's College.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you graduate from there?

Mr. Simoneau

No. I met a girl and she was more important than my education. (Laugh) We got married.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about reunions?

Mr. Simoneau

Reunions. About the last 15 years or so we've been going to reunions. I never had anything to do with it. I didn't join any military organizations. I didn't join the VFW or any of that. I didn't want to go around playing soldier or whatever. One year, on a vacation, we were driving down to Florida and we went through Biloxi, Mississippi. There was a big banner on a hotel right on the beach down there, saying, "Welcome, Iwo Jima Veterans." I told my wife, "Let's stop in and see what this is all about." I stopped in there and I met a fellow by the name of Bill Gropp and his wife and he said, "Do you belong to the 5th Marine Division Association?" I said, "No, Bill, I don't want to have anything to do with that junk." He said, "Well, why don't you join? We have reunions and get-togethers." I said, "No, forget it." He said, "Here take an application and think about it." A couple of years of later I was browsing around in my desk and I found this application and I said, "Well, I'll fill it out." I filled it in and started receiving the Spearhead which is the quarterly little magazine they put out and it mentioned reunions and I said, "Why don't we do this once." So we ended up going to this reunion and gosh

darnit Richard, I met so many wonderful people. I've met sons and daughters and relatives of guys that were in the service and are now looking for information. They were so nice and I said, "Boy, this is really great." Then I also found Richard, that the older you get, the more important it is to touch base with the past. Your future is two inches long and your past is 15 yards long. It becomes very important. I just love to see these people and there isn't a reunion that goes by that I don't meet a dozen new people that I correspond with or exchange things with. It's just fantastic. I really enjoy it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is there anything else that you have thought of about World War II?

Mr. Simoneau

I think we've pretty much said it all.

Mr. Misenhimer

Ralph, I want to thank you again for taking time to do this today and thank you again for your service to our country.

Mr. Simoneau

My pleasure and thank you for your service. We all serve in our own way. I'll get that stuff together and ship it out to you.

(end of interview)

Transcribed by:
Lesle W. Dial
Beeville, Texas
December 11, 2008

Oral History by:
Richard Misenhimer
P.O. Box 3453
Alice, Texas 78333
Home: (361) 664-4071
Cell: (361) 701-5848