

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. Jim Wilcox

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Interviewer: Pete Jensen

Mr. Jensen: This is Pete Jensen. Today is March 7, 2009. I am interviewing Mr. Jim Wilcox. This interview is taking place in Fredericksburg, Texas at the Nimitz Museum. This interview is in support of the Center of Pacific War Studies Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information related to this site. [Some static and interruption of tape]. Okay, Jim, if you could tell us a little bit about your family history.

Mr. Wilcox: All right. Jim Wilcox. I was born in Birmingham, Alabama, in Edelman Hospital on December 16, 1922. Now, about my family background, my mother and I lived (unclear) to understand that she was a widow; that my father had died in a steel mill. I never knew my father, and this turned out to be a false statement to begin with. We lived just as if my father hadn't existed. Mother was married two additional times, both (unclear). I do not know where my mother was at the time I left high school at Minor Heights in Jefferson County, the county high school at that time. I was in my senior year, but a friend, Lloyd Stout, came by and said, "Let's go join the Marines."

And I said, "Lloyd, we got run off from the Navy last week. What do you think that the Marines will do the same thing?" But he said, "No, let's go try it." So we--we lived in Minor Heights at that time; had to go in (unclear) ride in to Insley, catch a street car, cost seven cents to go downtown. We went through the routine examination and this happened to be on a Friday, August 8th, 1940. Then the doctor examined me; he says, "Well," he says, "you checked out." He says, "The maximum--minimum height is five-two; you're five-six." He says, "The minimum weight is 122." He says, "You're 126." He says, "You're in." He says, "Be here Monday and catch the train for Parris Island, South Carolina." I said, "Okay." Outside waiting for Lloyd to come out. Lloyd comes out; I said, "Lloyd, how're we going to get down here Monday?" He said, "What for?" I said, "To catch that train to Parris Island." He says, "I ain't catching no train." I said, "You mean they didn't take you?" He said, "No." I said, "Why not?" He said, "I told them I wet my bed." I said, "Lloyd, everybody is wetting the bed." I said, "That's it." Consequently, I left on Monday to go to Parris Island, and as fate would have that, a hurricane was coming in at that time. You couldn't get to Parris Island, so we went to Quantico, Virginia, which is the heart of the Corps. The NCO was out of the Fifth Regiment, Infantry, were our DI's; yeah,

that's it, DIs. We went through ten weeks of basic training, came out; got through with that. We went to Norfolk, Virginia, took the troop ship to Cuba, to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and from tent to tent, we spent six months then in Guantanamo.

Mr. Jensen: What were conditions like there?

Mr. Wilcox: Hot and dry and that was basically it. We spent roughly six months in a constant maneuver situation, practicing going down the cargo net to go ashore, getting back up the cargo net to come aboard. We were quite proficient. I remember at that time, well you don't get much news while you're in the service, but I do remember a statement being made by our president at that time, that he had 8,000 Marines, the First Marine Division, in--I keep wanting to say Guadalcanal--in Cuba, and he said they can take care of any other 8,000 men in the world. And I thought, Mr. President, I don't know whether we can do that or not. But the practicing then for that, and at that time I was also the first, was in artillery, getting communication, like forward control, forward targets back to the control center or central control, so they could adjust the howitzers to the height and distance they wanted, and of course, it's basic but it's a whole lot to learn for me, and I stayed basically that way then until--on December 20th that same year, I had to go into the hospital with appendicitis. I

spent two weeks in the naval hospital there in Cuba. That's the only time I had a roof over my head.

Mr. Jensen: Food better there?

Mr. Wilcox: Pardon?

Mr. Jensen: Was the food a little better there in the hospital?

Mr. Wilcox: No; well, yeah, yes it was. Not only that, you got it at a regular time frame every day, too. You had three--yeah, thank you. (Unclear). But anyway, it was abscessed and so instead of taking the appendix out, he just drained the abscess off and after that, he looked at it and he said, "Well,"--and I guess he knew; he was a Lieutenant Commander, which is same thing as a major in the Air Force. Of course, the Marines don't have a medical department. I think you understand that. We don't have preachers, either, but he said, "You'll be going back to the states in March." He says, "You'll be leaving down here." And I guess he was right. He said, "Now when you get back to Parris Island,"--and how he knew we were going to Parris Island; I didn't that either--but he said, "You go to the dispensary and check in and have them go in there and take that appendix out." I said, "Okay." So when I got back to the states, I wasn't going to go to the dispensary and check in at that time. So, first thing you know, I get a call to go down to the dispensary. I get down there and there's this lieutenant, Navy of course, and he says,

“Does that appendix bother you?” I said, “No.” And he checked it out; he said, “I’m not going to operate on you.” He said, “If it doesn’t bother you any, (unclear).” And it’s still there. But that was true. Then we got back to Parris Island and we stayed at Parris Island for right at six months. Now this is ’41, and we moved up to Jacksonville, North Carolina, on Highway 17. It--what’s that Marine base up there now? Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. I get these, go through these spells sometimes; my memory, especially current memory, goes slick real fast. But we go into Camp Lejeune and sure enough, right back to the tents. And the artillery was out on Highway 17, further back from the infantry, two infantry regiments we had at that time, the fifth and--first and fifth I believe it was. But anyway there were in--they had at least showers and they could do that but we were out on the highway. We were in tents and the only shower we had was sitting up on a pole, and you pulled a chain and the water came out of the tank that they had.

Mr. Jensen: It wasn’t hot running water, was it?

Mr. Wilcox: No, it was cold water (laughing). We were going through that--but they were real nice, now. Twice a week, they took us in, if we wanted to go, of course, by truck, we’d go into Camp Lejeune and use the showers in there. Of course, (unclear) from that, we’re getting on up to when the Japanese bombed Pearl

Harbor on that Sunday. We got that message; just happened to be at that time, we were in excellent weather at Camp Lejeune, but the grass around our area. And they had us all disperse; just get away from all the tents. And I thought at the time, I don't believe they're going to be able to bomb any of these tents, but that's what we went through. Of course, that was December, and now, up until--we left--I've got it down on a piece of paper here somewhere. Yeah, here's where we--okay, I was in the First Marine Division, Eleventh Marine Regiment Artillery, Special Weapons Battery. And that's where they had the special weapons; that was when they came in with the 75-millimeter tank destroyer, half-track, at that time. So I got down here that we left Camp Lejeune on the 9th of June of '42. From there, we went to San Francisco; we were in 'Frisco two or three days, and then we set sail on the John Erickson and that happened to be the troop ship that was with a Merchant Marine crew. The second day at sea, we found out that--they found out that they couldn't feed all the troops they had on there three meals a day. So we went from three meals a day to two meals a day. We went real fast, and that's what we stayed on then until we got into--we went into New Zealand on the 7th of July.

Mr. Jensen:

Was it real crowded on that ship?

Mr. Wilcox: Yes, it was real crowded on that ship, and the only thing you could have daily--well, they started off kind of, they had a sort of a slop chute, which was what we called--the phrase we had for canteen, and you could buy Pepsis and candy and that lasted two days and all the stock was gone. So there wasn't a man on there--of course we played cards and whatever you do and tried to do exercises (unclear). But the Erickson could only do six knots. That was the slowest ship in the convoy, so we to travel at that speed all the way into Wellington, New Zealand. Of course, we didn't know where we were going; almost didn't know when we got there. It was raining, cold (unclear). They have a winter.

Mr. Jensen: Twenty-two days?

Mr. Wilcox: About 22 days, roughly. (Unclear), I've got some further information where it's a little bit different (unclear). But we got into Wellington and the offload just took three days, all the transports. Of course, reloading them in the sequence that we were going--wherever, the island that we were going to; we didn't know at that time. We had to reload (unclear) and of course (unclear) artillery and our group. We went in on the third wave, of course after (unclear) had gone in. We left then, and--I've got right down here (unclear, going through papers.) Yeah, on the 22nd, that's when set sail and left. We were on the Hunter

Liggett at that time. The Hunter Liggett was manned by Coast Guard. We had used it when we were in Cuba, for our practice landings.

Mr. Jensen: What was the name of the ship?

Mr. Wilcox: The Hunter Liggett, USS Hunter Liggett. Of course, we--good crew to get along with. We got along fine with the British jarheads. Then we were notified, either on July the 7th or 8th; I'm not sure exactly what day, that the destination was Guadalcanal, British Solomon Islands. And I thought, okay but where is it? None of us in our group, and of course here again, (unclear) they didn't know where we were going; didn't know where Guadalcanal was, much less the British Solomon Islands. But we found out real quick. We landed, of course, on August 7th, and from August 7th we stayed until December 15th. I'll go through whatever that is later (unclear) for my time frame. We left on December 15th, right back aboard the Hunter Liggett again. (Unclear) I was--the next day being December 16th of '42, I was 20 years old.

Mr. Jensen: Twenty years old.

Mr. Wilcox: (Unclear). From there, back to, then, to go through Guadalcanal, I guess.

Mr. Jensen: Yes, yes.

Mr. Wilcox: I've got here--I don't know whether or not to read this (unclear); this is one I wrote to KLRN. They never used any, and here's one that I wrote for a girl that worked in our office. She was--a couple of years ago they wanted to--what subjects you were taking--but they wanted to interview someone who had been in World War II. These are the responses to questions that I got from her.

Mr. Jensen: Can we do this--can I have a copy of that?

Mr. Wilcox: Yes, sir, you can have a copy of everything that I have.

Mr. Jensen: If you just go ahead and sort of, you know, tell us what, you know, your experience was--

Mr. Wilcox: Okay. I'm going to that, then. Basically, we went in on, as I said, the third wave. Of course, they were able to lower the half-tracks. There was two of them, and special weapons had--I don't know really what all was in special weapons. Now I've got the listing of all the personnel, but I don't know all the different functions that were performed. I would like to think that the anti-aircraft gun that came in, the 90-millimeter, was under special weapons. But I do know that these tank destroyers were over on--we had two of them, two crews, five each. We had a crew chief, a sergeant; the gunner, that was my position, was a corporal; the driver was either a PFC or a corporal; and then you had two extra men in the back to feed ammunition to you,

because you were firing. It was all fixed ammunition, if you're familiar with artillery, as opposed to a howitzer or a mortar, it's not fixed ammunition, that is you can change the (unclear) and give it a different distance. If it's a rifle, it's fixed, just like a shell going into a rifle or anything else. If you've got good distance, you've got firepower. A 75-millimeter is roughly three inches, that's the diameter of the projectile. We went ashore again there, and we couldn't get far; everything was jammed up there with supplies, so we spent that night right around that base. I say a base, the basic equipment had gone ashore; no personal stuff. We didn't have (unclear) bag or anything like that. The only thing we had was what was in--on our backs. Also I had an extra pair of pants, an extra shirt, two or three extra pairs of socks, and a mess kit. That was basically what we went ashore with.

Mr. Jensen: You were carrying that on your back.

Mr. Wilcox: Basic essentials, yes. That was on our backs, each one of us. (Unclear), that's all we had for the rest of the time we was on there, for four months. When we left, a different deal, but the first night was all right and then it got a little better organized on the next day. When we went ashore--let me back up just a second here. About two o'clock that morning, the Navy started shelling. Of course, if anything was there, any kind of close,

they would have hit it and it would have dispersed. But as it so happened, by the time we went in then with daylight, we were (unclear) whether troops were there (unclear) went to the hills. And they were there, oh yes, but this time we just really hit them by surprise. The second day out, (unclear) we finally had a little more stuff that belonged to them. Then the third day, we picked up our assignment. We went to--if I could get a map, I'd show you later on too, you could see it--we went to our position, which was the Matanikau River. It was north, I'd say north--northwest of the island. (Unclear) Tenaru, whoever got to Tenaru, they got the rough deal. We were in paradise where we went. We went to the Matanikau; now after, of course, they had, by the second or third day, they had the mess tents set up and we were going to eat each day, with no more just eating what you went ashore with. We went on up to Matanikau then (unclear) by this time, dispersing. The number one man, I don't know if he accidentally shot himself; I'll never know and I don't want to know, really. He had an old Springfield rifle, bolt action, and he--how in the world he managed to shoot himself below the knee, just below the knee (unclear). I heard the shot; I turned around to see what had happened and that was our first casualty. But he was not in our group; he was not one of our crewmembers. We were with some (unclear) with artillery

there, but then we went on up to Matanikau, and the thing that we got up there at the end, we basically were staying on the alert. Anything that tried to come across that river, we did night duty. We'd go up the creek about 50 to 75 yards and looking down--of course, we called it a river, but you could wade all the way across it, without getting any place any deeper than your shoulders. We had to send, each night, two crew members and out of the two crews, that's ten of us, we'd have to go up there just at dusk, and you'd go through this sort of canebrake to get up to it. We had to do a listening, listening post. But the Japs never came in from that area. It was all wooded across (unclear) but it was creepy to get up there at night, especially on a dark night and you can't see a thing. I happened to have--I don't know how I acquired that thing--a small machete, about so long. I remember the boy's name was Beall; he was from North Carolina, an old country boy. Of course, I was from Birmingham; I wasn't a country boy. But he, I remember one night we were up there, and you (unclear) the service, usually your nickname is your last name. Of course, mine being Wilcox, it was Willie. And Beall was (unclear). We were up there; oh yeah, we did have a blanket we had in our bags because we'd take that up there with us each night and we'd lay on that blanket to sit on it, and he whispered over to me--you

couldn't see him, even though he was right there. He said, "Willie, give me your machete." This brings me into the crabs; they didn't have pinchers but they're land crabs and they'd just drive you crazy. And they were all around that night. He said, "Give me your machete." I said, "Okay." And he started chopping, he hit the first one of them, but he cuts his blanket up (laughs). We ran out of there; I don't remember if it was Beall or who it was now but at daylight we (unclear) go back down and go through this canebrake. We started through there one morning and you could just (unclear) somebody walking across that creek, and you'd swear they were coming at you, and I motioned Beall to stay here, I would go (unclear). That's what I did; I went--oh, that's my daughter--[woman enters the room, apologizes for interrupting]. That morning (unclear) without saying anything, I was slowly going around through that canebrake on my hands and knees. And I get down there and there's a little rock sitting there and this little stick that's scraping back and forth on there, just like somebody's (unclear) it, making that noise as like somebody walking across that creek.

Mr. Jensen: Amazing!

Mr. Wilcox: You talk about relief, though, on somebody's face, that was it. I stood up then, and I said, "Come on, Beall, we're all right."

Mr. Jensen: On those nights, did you ever see any Japanese then?

Mr. Wilcox: No, sir. Only thing we saw, we would see, would be the shelling by the naval artillery. You could see that, no question about it, and I'll go into that too, in just a minute. And then there was another one we called Pistol Pete. He was an aircraft, of course, and we figured it was probably launched from a cruiser equipped (unclear). He'd just circle around at night, just circle around. Every once in a while, he put--this was before our aircraft got in there; we're talking about the early days. And he'd just circle around at night and he'd flash that light down, just something that would harass you, keep you awake. If their Navy was anywhere close, they'd fire an occasional round at night, just to keep us awake, I guess. I can remember when we were hit by-- we figured it was probably a 15-, 16-inch naval artillery shell. It hit a tree (unclear). At that time we stayed under trees as or protection, but these three occasions this happened. The first, the one I remember the most, the tree burst as that shell hit, and the shrapnel went in that tank destroyer. We had two 50-gallon tanks, one on each side in the rear, and they had two batteries on that, one on each side right at the running board where you'd step in. Why that position on it, I don't know but I guess (unclear). But that shrapnel went through one of those tanks and never exploded. It went through one of the batteries. But the thing that hurt us the most is that it hit the breech plate, breech

(unclear) screw-type artillery piece we had, and you couldn't close, you couldn't fire it. So we managed to get a quartermaster somewhere that had a file, and we got in there and we filed until we filed that thing down to where we could still use it. So we were never out of commission. I've got a narrative in there from a friend of mine. He was a different opinion; he wasn't there but we had been in artillery together and he was still with the 75-millimeter artillery. Somebody fed him some bad information when he said we were completely out of service. No, it didn't go out of service except for the time it took us to file that breech block and get it out of there. Then the other two were--I don't like to get to this point. [Long pause; Mr. Wilcox chokes up.] Let me come back to this.

Another duty we had, we had to assist, but we never used it. The one time we did use it was almost suicidal. We had a bulldozer come in, and dig us a trench line close to the beach, between the side of the river where we were, to where we could fire at anything coming in. And they dug a--did a beautiful job of it, and we were just at the edge of the trees where we could get some protection from the view from there. We got lined up to where you could just barely (unclear) you could just see the muzzle of the 75 just at ground level. The one time the lieutenant--can't think of his name now; I've got it down there--

was with us and doing something. He wanted to see (unclear). It just so happened that a sub came up out there. He said, "Okay, let's fire on it." And I said, "Lieutenant, we don't have the range. He's beyond where we can get to." And I'll tell you, he said, "I said fire." Our driver was named Shorty; I said, "Shorty, while we're getting ready," I said, "you crank the engine." Our sergeant, he wasn't saying anything. He was scared of the lieutenant. And I'm just a kid now; I'm 19 years old. But I had been in artillery two years (unclear); I had the experience. So he cranked that engine up and I said, "Lieutenant, we're going to fire but I assure you the shell is not (unclear) reach it." And I fixed it at an angle that I knew I could get maximum length and still not hit the water because, you know, some elevations you only go out a short distance. We fired and I don't know, just guessing at that point, I'd say it was a good 50 or 60 yards before--when that shell hit the water. And I said, at that point, I said, "You know, I didn't (unclear)." The Jap subs came in and they had, what I would say, probably a 50, 75 caliber rifle or shell on deck. You've probably heard of this, and they did. It was a small artillery piece that they had on the ship, and they had that; it was up there. So when I fired that first shot, I said, "Shorty, get the hell out of here." So we went out in reverse; we drove into it and back out. [Approximately seven

second interruption in the tape.] (Unclear). Of course we were already starting to move. The second shell hit in front of us, almost right in the water. The third shell, we found out later, had hit where we had been but we were gone. One good thing came out of it; that lieutenant never came back with us again. (Mr. Jensen laughs). I don't know where he hid the rest of the time but (unclear)--he was a part of the whole special weapons group and there were others on there and I never did find out actually, because we were formed so hastily before we left Parris Island. (Unclear) how many different types of weapons we had or where they were. We got out of that one then. The other two I wanted to mention were both (unclear). We were getting on up into the time frame then where we had acquired some lumber and we had built our own potty, and I've had a little experiences doing carpenter work in summer months. I built us a potty, but I didn't have enough material and I had a two-holer, but I had them so close together that you couldn't sit alongside each other. You had to sit one going one way, one went the other way. And everything was fine until one day, the infantry troops came through there. They were going to go on around us and go up into the wooded area. And how the hell do you know, they used our potty. And it was just a few days after that, we all had lice. So what could we do? We burned the potty (chuckles). We

didn't have any choice, and there was nothing we could do with it. But then we had two other things. We built this--one other thing--we built this big seat. It would sit up there and we got--I want to get to this first because we're going to lose this fellow. We built--we had a boy from, Mike Rader was his name, but he had a beautiful voice; he sang. And then we had Michael Joy; I remember Mike was from Boston, and he was our entertainer, he told jokes. Now we're in a combat situation now with all this, but we built a throne and Mike, when he was singing, he'd sit up there on that thing, and when he was through singing, Joy would get up there and he'd tell the jokes. This went on for, oh, just a long dry spell we had there, and then we were up there one night (unclear) and after dark you'd change positions. We were in our ready position, thinking somebody'd come across that river. And here, I don't know what kind of shells they were, but I know it was naval artillery. It hit in a tree burst, and the first one to go was Rader. (Mr. Wilcox becomes choked up.) I knew this would be hard to go through but...he (unclear) his shoulders. There were no replacements now; (unclear). Rader was the first one to go. And then the same thing within about ten days, we lost others (unclear). One of them was in my crew, the crew I was in, and one in the other gun crew. We had two units there. We stayed fairly close together but we had different assignments

occasionally. We had, I think, (unclear). And then one night, I don't know what they bombed us with, but they hit--I thought that island would turn upside down. But it hit, and not a scratch on anything (unclear). That was then, and up until we got a 90-millimeter anti-aircraft gun that came in, up 'til then they pretty well shelled us--I remember one time looking up there and there were ten bombers come across there in line, and they just--at that time before our artillery, our naval artillery could get in there, I mean anti-aircraft artillery got in there, they did, but once they set up those two 90-millimeters, things changed then. We had something to do the (unclear) with. And of course, we were protecting that landing strip, getting it in shape. We were connected with that way, but the group that finally got that in and we could get aircraft in there. And then planes started changing around. But it was the night that we matched naval artillery at night that they called that place clean. You've got Guadalcanal; directly from it is Tulagi and Florida. I think Japanese headquarters were on Tulagi; I believe that was right, I'm not certain...they were on Tulagi. But there was a section between those two, a space rather, between Tulagi and Florida where a ship--ships could go through. And this is where the Japanese attacked us one night, by being in that area. Our Navy comes through and they come out to (unclear), and they were

(unclear) our ships and of course, there were carriers and they named it the Ironbottom Bay. I remember the Hunter Liggett was a troop transport that--while we were unloading it, third day I believe it was--it was hit while we were unloading. It was in shallow enough water at that time, at high tide, it just went right down and of course when the tide went out, why it's still sitting there. (Unclear) submarines torpedoed (unclear), not knowing it was already (unclear). Every night--I told you about Pistol Pete--we, I know there's some more I want to--

Mr. Jensen: You didn't have anything to do with the airfield, then?

Mr. Wilcox: No, no. (Unclear, both speaking together). This friend of mine (unclear) made up howitzers, Riviera, I've got a document of his there that I'll just give you. We were in boot camp together and we lived--he was from Alabama also. It's got everything, day to day, everything that occurred on that island with his group in the regular artillery, tracked (?) howitzer, which we were both in at one time. He has everything down on that. They were on the (unclear). If you've ever read "Guadalcanal Diary," that fellow is right sick. He talks about his tent that he sleeps in every night and you know, he was only there, I think, two months out of the four that we were there. But we weren't in tents; we--you were sleeping on the ground, and that coral is hard. Of course, you've got the palm trees as well as just regular trees there. On one

occasion, I don't want to forget that one for you; we did fire and get a Japanese marksman out of big trees with that howitzer. We totally were guessing whether he was in there or not, but we just got off in a distance and fired a shot up in there and blew the top out of that tree and he came down with it. Other than that, we did fire across the river where the Japanese were expected to be coming. We were just firing at random, you know. (Unclear), this was before Mike Rader died, yeah. The two ammo men who (unclear) half-track, we got (unclear) of course, get your target and then fire. But we fired so many rounds that the--that shell had a safety pin in it--supposedly if you dropped it, then it wouldn't explode. We talked about it and I said that I think it'd explode anyway without pulling that pin. But he kept (unclear). He got the blood; he got (unclear) in his fingers, to the joint, and I looked back there and saw it, and I said, "Mike," I said, "Don't pull the next pin. Let's see what it does." Sure enough, it exploded just like (unclear). So this safety thing was for dropping. Other than that, our combat, I don't know why--I thank God he put us in that position, but he did. It was one of the, I think, few groups on Guadalcanal that didn't have all of the, from what I can read on it, thinking about this fellow that wrote "Guadalcanal Diary," he talks about being in a tent at

night there with a chaplain. That's another thing. I was on that island four months; I ain't seen a chaplain.

Mr. Jensen: (Unclear) you said the Marines do not have chaplains.

Mr. Wilcox: No, the Marine Corps was Navy. The Marines are not a separate organization, and with that--

Mr. Jensen: They're separate now, though, right?

Mr. Wilcox: No, they're still part of the Navy, oh yeah. Of course, it's being treated, as far as (unclear) is concerned, as if it were--you don't know that--but you don't have any medical or pastoral.

Mr. Jensen: That's handled by the Navy?

Mr. Wilcox: All Navy, yeah. The Navy that's with, attached to the Marines, that's the corpsmen. Now we had one corpsman on there. I've got a picture in this one magazine (unclear) story I'm going to give you, that shows the fellow sitting on the hood. I've got his name in there, but he was a corpsman. We did have a corpsman with the five--actually eleven people with our two, and he was with us all the time. And then, you've got three people in the picture with this tank destroyer. I'm sitting in the driver's seat with the helmet on because we're close to trees and things fall out of trees. Our driver, he's sitting on the hood without anything on except his pants, and then the corpsman is sitting there. I don't--these things come back to memory, too; I've got them written down here somewhere, but following the last big

naval gun battle, the hospital on the island was an old, let's say, farmhouse with a porch around it just like you've seen, or probably seen, in some of the country here. This was the dispensary. Quite often, they'd need blood, and we'd go in and give blood for the (unclear). This one was right after the big naval battle, and we got in that day; they wanted everybody to come in and give blood. They had beds out on the porch with Navy personnel in them. Of course, we found this out later that they was all Navy. Of course, that was to be expected, I guess; that's a dumb question, dumb statement. We looked at (unclear); let's see, I've forgotten who was, I think Beall was with, Beall, yeah (unclear). We looked over there and we saw this patient in the bed. Of course, it's an old, old style iron bed and the foot of it is tilted. It's up a foot, maybe 18 inches. He's lying in there, and his two feet were up in the air and they're both propped up. Right at the, just above the heel, right on the joint there, you could see where it just was like something sliced it or cut it open. Of course, what happened, this shrapnel went across there. He's probably on a gun or on deck. This blood just dripped, dripped, and then his head, then, alongside his shoulder, there's blood coming out (unclear). We, of course, (unclear) and finally realized that there's so many of men there that were in worse shape than he's in, that he wouldn't be out

there on that porch (unclear). And I've often wondered (unclear) whether he survived it. They had a trick, too, that they pulled on us when we'd go to the dispensary to give blood. Yeah, they did. I don't know where, at that time, I don't know where they got those miniatures, but they'd have a miniature whiskey, and that's what we'd squeeze on. We'd squeeze on that because that made that blood go faster. I think I went in there three, maybe three or four times. It was the least we could do. Not one man out of the crew ever refused to go in and give blood.

Mr. Jensen: I've heard or I've read where there were a lot of Koreans there, workers, when they were building the airstrip? The Japanese had a lot of Koreans there?

Mr. Wilcox: I do not know. I couldn't address that one. It could've been, but I do know, as I read later on about it, that those were dispersed as soon as we started the attack. But, yes, they came in later. Now they did have some natives there--I don't know; I have a picture in the (unclear), showing he'd cut the head off one of these Japs. What enjoyment you'd get out of something like that, I don't know.

Unidentified woman: This is the picture.

Mr. Wilcox: Yeah, that's the picture there (unclear, both speaking together).

Mr. Jensen: Tell us about the importance of the battle.

Mr. Wilcox: The importance of the battle, and we found out the third day we were there on the island, was when we found stacks of Japanese occupational currency, and it had imprinted on them, Japanese occupational currency in Australian pounds. They were in ten, twenty and fifty pound notes, and you're talking about millions of dollars worth of these things, and this was their next target.

Mr. Jensen: They're plan was to take Australia.

Mr. Wilcox: Australia was the next step, yes sir. Consequently, we realized that that island had to be taken. We had to stop it.

Mr. Jensen: That was really the (unclear). Wake Island, I guess, was the first but (unclear) Guadalcanal was probably the one that turned the war?

Mr. Wilcox: I think that--right. Guadalcanal was the stop point. You had got as far as you go; let's go start back. I don't know that those exact words were said by anyone, but that's the way it was. This is the stop; you're not going any further.

Mr. Jensen: I read that the United States went from defensive to offensive (unclear), but the Japanese just the opposite.

Mr. Wilcox: You're right (unclear). I might question some of our actions later on; I don't think Iwo Jima--I mean, not Iwo Jima but that other island should've been taken--the high rate of losses we had on that island--but that was the Second Division, Okinawa. The Second Division, I mean, yeah, Second Marine Division really

took a beating on there because they didn't have the information on the ground underneath the water as you go in. It was coral and consequently they couldn't get the landing craft in close enough; they had to get out and wade. Made a perfect target, so consequently the Second Division lost a heavy, heavy load. At Guadalcanal, I think we had probably the lowest percentage of any battle, not that they didn't want us dead, but it just did not (unclear). The Navy, and I've got to say this, they took so much pride; they took a beating. They had to keep us there, keep us fed, and at the same time keep the enemy out, and not only keep them out but try to destroy them. You had a twofold mission; you had to stop them and prevent them from going anywhere else to do anything. So this (unclear), I think that this was really it. (Unclear). We left Guadalcanal on the 15th of December. I remember crawling--going up that cargo net, climbing up there to get aboard that ship. The only thing I had was what I had on my back, all of us (unclear). We went aboard, and as I said, it was the Hunter Liggett, manned by the Coast Guard. They had taken all the pads off the bunks in the ship, and they put them around the rails of that ship (unclear) shrapnel, possibly stop that. So the bunks that we stayed on, they were fine, fine; it's a whole lot better than that coral on Guadalcanal. It took us about, I'm going to say three days, to get into Australia. We were north

of Melbourne. I can't remember the town; it starts with an "A". I do remember that that's where we came down with malaria. I mean, we thought the mosquitoes on Guadalcanal were bad; they were small compared to these in Australia. I mean huge mosquitoes. The third day, I think, I believe the third day, I mean we started falling like flies. I went out, I don't know who else at that time, but we went to a U.S. Army hospital in Melbourne. That was the next step. I stayed there two weeks, in that hospital in Melbourne. The word got out that we'd be coming back to the states, all of us that were in there with malaria. We did; we--I've forgotten exactly what date now, that we went aboard the USS America. It was a real plush cruise ship that was the SS America (unclear) what was--I've got that in there somewhere, too (unclear). Anyway, it was a big ship; it had a crew of 1,000, and they even had quarters, separate quarters of course for officers, and we went aboard, we had two options. There was 400 of us that had come down with this (unclear) malaria and all of us were going back to (unclear) the Fourth Division. We found this out later, that we--that's where we were going, to the Fourth Division. We left Melbourne then, (unclear), went down to Auckland, New Zealand, and then picked up RAAF personnel. I don't know exactly how many; somebody said a thousand, whether or not there was that many

or not, I don't know. I do know that we left Auckland, New Zealand with those troops, and we made Frisco in six days, going back, unescorted, which was--you just couldn't--you wouldn't have believed it could happen. At night, as soon as it got dark, the ship would change course and throw off all garbage, and then (unclear) go back on course. Next night, it'd go in a different direction. Every night it changed, throughout the distance; just got all the garbage out. We got into Frisco in five days; went from Frisco--

Mr. Jensen: What was the condition on the ship?

Mr. Wilcox: Oh, there were--they had two options. I've forgot (unclear). I respect the Navy nurses, but they had ten pregnant nurses on that ship. So we had an option: we could stand guard duty on the officers' quarters for the nurses or we could work in the kitchen. I picked the kitchen. I'd seen pregnant women before; I knew what they looked like. (Mr. Jensen and unidentified woman laugh). So we--I think I must've gained ten pounds. The five days on that ship (unclear).

Mr. Jensen: What'd you weigh then? You probably didn't weigh much coming off of Guadalcanal.

Mr. Wilcox: I weighed--when we went into Guadalcanal I weighed 165 pounds. I checked into that hospital down in Melbourne, I weighed 130. But, yes: of course, I'm a small person anyway.

My weight today is 140. Then we got into Frisco; from Frisco right on down to San Diego to Camp Elliott. I think that base is still there; I don't know. We got into there in January. Moving on forward now, we were there two days and we were all told, okay, you get thirty days' leave. As fate would have it, I left, OI don't' know what day now. I know what day we got into Alabama, and went downtown Birmingham and got a wedding ring.

Unidentified woman: That was 66 years ago. You didn't tell him what you had to eat on Guadalcanal either.

Mr. Wilcox: What I had to eat? For 30 days, we really got low on supplies. That's a point; thank you for bringing it up. We had reached the point where we were down to 25 rounds of ammunition for those two half-tracks. This is in November--October-November time frame. And the ships couldn't get in for us. (Unclear). During that roughly, I'm going to say 20 day time frame, we ate two meals a day--Japanese rice and Australian corned beef, that's it. You'd eat it, (unclear), you'd want it; you don't want it, why don't eat it, but that's it. And that's of course that took its toll on us, but--

Unidentified woman: (Unclear).

Mr. Jensen: Okay. You're probably glad you had--that the Japanese left that.

Mr. Wilcox: We were, oh yeah, oh yeah. They left so fast, they couldn't destroy anything. They even (unclear) an old truck that they drove around (unclear). We never, up to that point, (unclear). We were on that island and I never saw a chaplain during that whole time that we were there. But that fellow that wrote "Guadalcanal Diary", he saw them every day and they had services and all; we didn't (unclear). That's another thing that the Marines don't have; they don't have a chaplain, either. That's also Navy. We got to the states and--

Mr. Jensen: I've got to ask you one question, not to interrupt, but what was-- when you went to Australia, what was your duty there? I mean, you had malaria, but were you--?

Mr. Wilcox: No, it was just rest. (Both speaking together). That would've been R & R, but I've got malaria; I could never experience the R & R.

Mr. Jensen: So then they sent you back to the states.

Mr. Wilcox: What happened to the rest of the division from that point on, all I can do is read the papers. Then when I get back, of course, we were married, and we went back to Elliott. As soon as we get to Elliott, they ship us back to North Carolina, the same place we left about a year or so ago.

Mr. Jensen: Did your wife travel with you there, too?

Mr. Wilcox: She came up there later. Yeah, she came later and stayed a while, but then she went back home. I went back in regular artillery then. The Fourth Division, I suppose--I don't know if they had special weapons or not. Anyway, I went back as crew chief on a 75-millimeter howitzer, which is an entirely different weapon from the rifle. From there, we went to Pendleton; shipped back to Pendleton for--I don't know how long we'd been there now, but on the 30th day of November, we were crating cloverleafs of ammunition. There was a naval ammunition dump there at Camp Pendleton.

Mr. Jensen: You said you were crating what?

Mr. Wilcox: Cloverleafs out of artillery shells. What you do, an artillery shell, you stack them. You put them three to a package and tie them together, strap them together. That's your cloverleaf, those three rounds. Then you stack them in whatever they're going to be carried in. We had a working party. (Unclear) one of these six-by-six trucks. Me being the senior NCO at that time, I get to sit up front with the driver. Big mistake. We're going back down (unclear); everybody wants to get in and go on liberty, like we do every Friday while we were at Pendleton. We were all in good physical condition, all of us again. So we get in there, starting down, starting back, and, I can't remember the driver's name now, but he might've been going a little faster than he

should have, but that didn't account for this soft spot that we all of a sudden hit in that road. When he hit it, I mean that truck just flipped up. (Unclear) we knew where (unclear) we had liberty each weekend. And that truck flipped up and sideways then, and onto a grassy area, and it's before seat belts, also. Everyone else flew out of the truck except me, and I slid on that side, the driver's seat and the truck just slid right down on top of me. And it just so happened, I guess the one thing that saved my life was that there was a small trench or ditch that my body went into, and then the truck on top of it. Well, they pushed that truck off of me, and when they pushed that truck off of me, why this left leg, this left foot right on my left leg, flew up and hit me in the face. And I looked at that and I said (unclear). So I don't know; at that point there was no pain. There was just this shock. Of course the break was a compound fracture of the upper thigh.

Unidentified woman: (Unclear).

Mr. Wilcox: Yeah, a compound fracture of the left clavicle, shoulder bone. The first thing I knew, all of a sudden I was just passed out. And I woke up later--I don't know how quick that ambulance got there (unclear). Okay, I do remember this, though. I did pass out and woke up in the ambulance and they gave me a shot of something that knocked me back out. And I didn't--this was on a Friday night--and I woke up Sunday afternoon. At that time

I'm in a hospital bed (unclear) and I could see the leg sticking straight up in traction, and I looked around and she was standing at the foot of the bed; this was Sunday afternoon. That basically was the end of my career. I stayed in the hospital six months. You couldn't get out of the hospital until you were ready to go back to duty. I never quite reached that point where I was ready to go back to duty. It just--it didn't work out that way. I did go back, and by then of course, the division--well, the division shipped out before I ever got out of traction. They were gone the week after that. But they did send the sergeant major and gunny; they came by to see me before they left. I don't know; I think that now it was a godsend. I think the deal was that between Tinian, Saipan and Iwo Jima--those were the next three combats that this division went through. The artillery suffered 80 percent casualties, from the time they left through those three campaigns. I'm not saying they're all dead, but there were casualties. You're talking 80 percent of the original personnel and that's quite a blow for artillery. Now, for infantry it's not surprising at all; you'd expect that, but you wouldn't expect it in artillery. I can't vouch for that figure but I believe and understand from the original cadre, yes, you could do it because you (unclear). So the original complement (unclear). Of course, I had several friends that were at Iwo, and the question about

that; too, did they really have to go through Iwo? I don't know; it's not for me to say, but there'll be flak on that, I guess forever, because we had already reached the point we had the bomb so-- but anyway, it's--we went to Washington (unclear) all climbed that memorial, but--. After I got out of the hospital, six months, why, I went right back to the original job that I'd done the first couple, three months after I was in the service. I started, or after we got back to the states from Cuba, I went back to driving truck. I drove a truck, then, for the rest of my career. My enlistment was up in '44, all the way through '44, and they held me another--I couldn't pass the physical but they wouldn't discharge me on disability, but I couldn't pass the physical to reenlist, so they held me 'til--another eleven months and then they discharged me November '45.

Unidentified woman: (Unclear).

Mr. Wilcox: (Unclear, both speaking together). That's the story of my career.

Mr. Jensen: What did you do after you left the service?

Mr. Wilcox: After I left the service, we--I didn't know what to do; I didn't have anything except the final year of high school. So I started off at--they didn't put me--I applied a disability after I got out and they put me on 100%. But it didn't last but four months and they put it to 20. The GI Bill; I started out with the--

Unidentified woman: (Unclear).

Mr. Wilcox: Well, a machinist first, yeah. I thought I'd be a tool and die; (unclear) father, I got this from him, that I could get a job with it anyway. So I went into (unclear) senior high school there in Jefferson County, Birmingham. And I was doing good; I made a pretty good machinist there. But--

Unidentified woman: Then he had trouble with his leg.

Mr. Wilcox: Then I had trouble with the leg. The peg got loose in there, and Birmingham didn't have a V.A. hospital (unidentified woman speaking in background, unintelligible) so they sent me to Montgomery. First they sent me up to, what's that fort outside of Birmingham, Army Depot. I stayed there a couple of weeks and they couldn't handle it, so they sent me to the V.A. hospital in Montgomery. They took the [considerable background noise for approximately 17 seconds; Mr. Wilcox and the unidentified woman are speaking but are unintelligible].

Mr. Jensen: So this is a piece of--?

Mr. Wilcox: That's the lower half of--

Mr. Jensen: Piece of what came out of your leg?

Mr. Wilcox: Yeah, uh-huh. They couldn't take it out because that was before--today they'd put a rod through it. But that was then, either that or you'd just let (unclear) form. They put this in there and when they couldn't get it out; it's got a knot here on the side now.

Unidentified woman: The screws are still in.

Mr. Wilcox: The screws are still in there. But it got loose at the bottom and they had to take it out. So they, they finally just kept working it back and forth until they broke it off.

Mr. Jensen: Now, they'd put an incision about that long (unclear).

Mr. Wilcox: Yeah. But this one, I've got a scar (unclear) from here to here.

Unidentified woman: (Unclear).

Mr. Wilcox: It came out and that ended my career temporarily, being a machinist. So that's when I changed over into watch making, working primarily on clocks. I--(unidentified woman interjects a comment but is unintelligible). No, I think we were just barely scraping by. Then I got out of that; the watchmaker I was working for moved to Mobile. This was around '49 now, '48-'49; I guess it was, '48-'49. He took us with him to Mobile. I went with him, I guess a year and a half, two years, but he and his partner split, so I went to a jewelry store and it just so happened that my boss at that time, he's dead now, in fact both of them are dead, but he was Army and the other partner was a Navy man, so we got along together as far as being veterans. They thought I'd (unclear). He had a friend out at Brookley Air Force Base in Mobile, that they were hiring temporary out there, so I went there and I stretched the truth a little bit about my background as a machinist, the time frame, you know, to get

around the minimum number of years, and I got put in at aircraft wheel and brake repair, temporary, and that meant not to exceed 90 days. Twenty-eight years later, I retired. (Mr. Jensen laughs). But I did--you'd join the machine shop then as a junior machinist--and it didn't take long, I worked up to chief machinist and then to foreman, and at that point they did cut back on (unclear). I changed over from a labor position to management and stayed to retire, and I retired as a GS-12, when I retired in '78. And then, I was mostly production control, monitoring contracts. We had equipment coming in from the field to be built or repaired by contract, and I monitored those contracts, also with cross-service demands with the Army and Navy, and I had to visit with them once a quarter. I'd go to Frisco once a quarter, Ogden, Utah once a quarter, Dayton, Ohio once a quarter. Finally I became eligible for retirement at age 55, December that year. (Unclear, unidentified woman speaking in background at the same time. Her comments are unintelligible). Yeah, I forgot that, moved to San Antonio (unclear). I stayed nine to twelve years, but finally got to 11 - 12 real quick. But I had competition there in San Antonio that they didn't have; we didn't have all those minorities (chuckles) in Mobile. And I'm not faulting that; don't misread that statement. I've had success (unclear). And I did that before I left Mobile,

though, I did start this evening division of college. I've got, let's see, 48 semester hours, I think it is, something like that. But when we left Mobile, I was going to a Jesuit college there, and left Mobile for San Antonio, the circumstances at that time, I felt like I'd just let it go for now, won't pursue going any further. But as it worked out, I never did finish any more of college. And I retired in, what was it? Fifty-eight? Sixty-eight. Anyway I've been retired--

Unidentified woman: It's a long time.

Mr. Wilcox: Seventy-eight, seventy-eight, yeah. 1978 I retired, yeah. Since then we have, well they did increase my disability from 20 to 30%, and it's been there ever since. I've never gone back; after the V.A. (unclear), I--since then. Of course I turned 86 last December.

Unidentified woman: (Unclear) volunteer in the hospital.

Mr. Wilcox: Yeah, (unclear) I retired; I volunteered first with the Shrine Hospitals, driving back and forth to Houston and Galveston with them. I worked American Cancer Society, bringing patients to them for a while, and then I worked at a Lutheran Hospital, volunteering, and then from there I started working at Methodist in San Antonio. It's been sixteen years, '91, and I found a home. I really have; in fact was president of the Bluebird Auxiliary, 600 of us, something like that, volunteers. I was president of it

three years ago. Other than that, [tape ends abruptly, without
any closing comments by Mr. Jensen or Mr. Wilcox.]

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