

Leonard Zaehler Oral History Interview

CLARENCE BRYK: This is Clarence C. Bryk, and today is March 6th, 2010, and I am interviewing former PFC Leonard Zaehler and this interview is taking place in the Nimitz Museum in Fredericksburg, Texas. And the next person you will hear is Mr. Zaehler, who will tell us about his experiences in World War II. Mr. Zaehler?

LEONARD ZAEHLER: Well, to start from the way beginning, when I was sixteen, I tried to join the Marines Corps and lied a little bit about my age, but they still told me come back in a couple of years and talk to them then. So when the war broke out, I knew I would be drafted, and there was no other place I wanted to go but in the Marine Corps. So I figured I was going to be drafted soon, so I enlisted and I went from Chicago to San Diego. I went through boot camp in San Diego. I was assigned to Marines Air. I was sent to Camp Miramar, which is in California, and I spent some time there until we shipped overseas. We went right from Camp Miramar to the dock and went overseas. I went overseas on the *President Taylor*, which was an old ship, but it was a good one -- it got us there -- and then we went to New Caledonia. From New Caledonia, we started north and, well, we hit a lot of small islands where

sometimes we would get off the ship and go ashore for a few days and other times we just anchored while they took on some supplies. Oh, I was in the Marshalls, and the Solomons, the Admiralties, and all the number of small islands where we made a stop on our way going north. We did have a stop in Peleliu in the Palau Islands. We were there after the fighting, but that was a rough one for the guys that were there when they took it. And eventually wound up in the Philippines, the island of Mindoro, which I think is on the China Sea side, and when we got there our CO came up to me and gave me my papers so I could go home. We were still on board ship in the harbor. We spent two weeks on board the ship in the harbor. They wouldn't let us off, because with the landing ships, they said the kamikazes were going in and we would be too much of a target. So they kept us on board ship and the Navy did a wonderful job of keeping the kamikazes away from the harbor. We finally went ashore there and I was told with my papers I would have to sign up and whenever my name came to the top of the list, I would get transportation in the direction I was going, not knowing where the next destination would be. I had been in the Marshall Islands at least three times getting transportation. Finally, from the Philippines, I got on a DC-3 that flew us to the Marshalls. I got to the

Marshalls. I spent about two weeks there. My name came to the top and I got on a freighter that was going to the Hawaiian Islands. Got pushed off there in the Hawaiian Islands and I was there for a couple of weeks and finally got on a hospital ship, the -- I think it was *Coontz*, C-O-O-N-T-Z, and we went to San Francisco to the Navy base there. We got stuck there because of all the medical problems and things that we had to go through. They finally put us on a train and sent us back to San Diego. While I was overseas in the service squadron of MAG-12, I had a machine shop trailer, which had a small drill press and a milling machine attachment. The normal things you would find. I got hooked up with the mechanics that were working on the ground vehicles and the biggest job I had there was cutting down brake drums and grinding valves for the mechanics that were working on the vehicles. But this Emirau Island that I was on was just two degrees south of the equator and I think -- trying to get my memory going -- I believe it was only about two miles wide and maybe three miles long. We went in there and we were standing guard while the Seabees built an airstrip so they could bring the planes in. And we spent quite a bit of time there. I don't remember which island it was on, but we did see a lot of flashing out on the horizon and we thought it was a

storm until we're told that was Coral Sea battle. We weren't anywhere near to be involved, but it's something I remember now of what we were seeing. And well, we just made a lot of stops and I spent almost two years in the South Pacific before, like I said, I got my papers to come home from the Philippines. And it took the long way. I think it took me, oh, about three weeks to get from the Philippines back to the Hawaiian Islands, just waiting for transportation. And it was quite a trip. I keep it in my memory, but wouldn't want to do it again. After I got back, we had been in enough combat zones -- when the Japanese surrendered, our entire unit -- all the fellows there -- we had enough points to get discharged immediately. But they couldn't do it until we got back to San Francisco and then to San Diego. Then they sent us home on a 30-day furlough. Then I had to report back to North Carolina -- Cherry Point -- and, oh, I think we were there for two or three months before we finally got up there. And we met a colonel that had been overseas with us -- we knew him -- and he asked why we weren't discharged and we said we were just waiting. So he came over and talked to somebody -- I don't even know who it was -- but we heard him saying, "These men were with me and they have enough points and I'm sure you're going to take care of

them." And he left. So we all got discharged shortly after that. A few every day. (laughs) So...

CB: What day was that? Do you remember what day you finally?

LZ: I don't remember the day. But I was supposed to get out the day before Thanksgiving and my wife had been down there with me. We were going to drive straight through to be home for Thanksgiving. But things got delayed and I got out the day after. So then we went up the east coast and visited one of the fellows that was discharged early. And we visited with him before we came back, because after missing Thanksgiving we said there was no rush until Christmas. (laughs) So it was quite an experience.

CB: What do you remember most?

LZ: Well, I wasn't used to the military way of doing things and it took quite a while to catch on to. When you're told to do something, you do it. (laughs) And we had quite a saying in there then that the difficult we do immediately, the impossible takes a little longer. We had some great people with us. And one of our -- well, he was the COO of our squadron. He had been a bomb disposal man and he won the Silver Star on clearing out a minefield. We all sort of looked up to him.

CB: Do you remember his name at all?

LZ: No, I don't. He was a captain. But I did get to know him pretty well, because if he found a Japanese bomb or something he always wanted to take it apart. So he'd come over to my machine shop trailer and borrow the tools. And the day he came walking over there with about a 50-pound bomb and he was smiling from ear-to-ear and said, "I never saw one like this before." He laid her down on the bench and started asking me for tools, and I laid everything out for him and I said, "Captain, do you think you have everything you need?" And he says, "I'm sure I do." I said, "Well, I think I hear chow call on the other side of the island."

CB: (laughs) You think you need to be some place else, huh?

LZ: (laughs) He said, "Maybe that's a good idea." But when I came back on later on, he had that entire bomb taken apart. All the pieces lying all over there.

CB: Did you ever see him or follow up on whatever happened to him?

LZ: No. Never did. At that time, getting back home, and getting back to work, and trying to get back to normal, I never followed up.

CB: What kind of work did you go back to when you got back to Chicago? What did you do?

LZ: I went back to my old job and they put me back on. But I couldn't take working inside after being outside all that time, so I left and I told them why. They said, well, if I didn't find anything, I should come back. But I finally got in driving a bus. I drove interstate for a while and then I did open a gas station. Borrowed some money and bought a gas station. That went along for a few years. Then I got back into my line of being a machinist.

CB: I see. I see. Did you see -- and you mentioned you saw the flashes from the Coral Sea -- do you remember being up close to any of the fighting at any one time that you can recall?

LZ: Not at that time. But in the Peleliu Island on the Palau Islands, most of the fighting was over. But there were still a lot of Japanese in the caves, so they were busy chasing them out. What they would do would be station some gunners at some of the different openings and then throw a flamethrower into the tunnels. It would either get them warm enough to chase them out, or it would burn up the oxygen so they'd have to come out.

CB: Uh-huh. Now I understand very few of them ever surrendered. They usually would be shot.

LZ: That's right.

CB: They'd come out and --

LZ: They were trained that way and they were told, well, that they would be a martyr if they killed 10 Americans before they got killed, and I guess that's the way they felt. I was in five different combat zones. And when our troops would land, if the Japanese were there, they went up into the hills just to stay away from us. And being in the Air Force, we didn't have any of the big equipment. No artillery or anything. So as long as they stayed out of our way, we stayed out of their way. But at one time, we did find one of them. He was alone and there were five or six of us together. Everybody noticed at the same time he had a bulge under his shirt. So we kept rifles trained at him, and one of the fellows got up, was going to try to get some information from him. And while he was talking -- he had his hands up -- he made a quick move for his shirt and I think he got hit from five different rifles. (laughs)

CB: Wow. What did he have? Did you see what he had underneath his shirt?

LZ: A grenade.

CB: He was ready to --

LZ: Yes.

CB: -- to blow you up, huh?

LZ: Yes. And him along with us. (laughs)

CB: Wow. Wow. Was that on Peleliu again or was --

LZ: No, that was on the island of Emirau.

CB: Emirau again.

LZ: Yes.

CB: So you actually were right there helping out with that one, huh?

LZ: Emirau was the island I was on the longest of any of them and we finally got that cleared out pretty well, and then it was turned over the New Zealanders because of the geographic location of it. And so one the New Zealand people took over, then we left and went somewhere else.

CB: Did you ever come under sniper fire from these hills? Did these guys try to pick you off?

LZ: I never did. But we had a fellow with us who was -- well, let's see if I can say this -- he was Hawaiian, and we had no washrooms. He just went over to the edge of the jungle, and some sniper took a couple shots at him. And we teased him for the rest of the time, told him he could run faster with his pants down than anybody else. He was the fastest thing on the island. (laughs)

CB: A couple shots and he was gone, huh?

LZ: (laughs) You bet.

CB: Anything else you can remember -- funny thing other than that? You know, like that sounds -- it's funny, but it's also scary.

LZ: Yes.

CB: And so this is one of the guys you worked with pretty much?

LZ: Yes. I worked with these mechanics on that island for quite a bit. And we did have -- let's see -- there were four of us in a tent, and the other three fellows were mechanics and I was the machinist. So I was doing some welding. I had a welder on the trailer. And I had one of these long -- about two-foot welding rod in my hand and we had a lot of bats underneath this tent. And one of them was flying close and I took a swing at it with this welding rod. Apparently it moved so fast it couldn't dodge it. I was able to hit him.

CB: Oh wow.

LZ: So I got the nickname of the Batman.

CB: Bat? (laughs)

LZ: And it was just two later the four of us were in this tent and a rat ran through the tent. This one mechanic had a hammer with him and he threw the hammer and it hit it. So he became the rat man. (laughs)

CB: Oh my. Oh my. Now this trailer, did you have to load it up and so forth when you moved? It was your own like shop?

LZ: Yes.

CB: And you loaded it up on what? LSTs or something like that?

LZ: Everything closed up on it and it would be locked. And I would take a chance and leave a lot of my personal stuff in the trailer, hoping that me and the trailer would meet again. (laughs)

CB: You weren't sure though, huh?

LZ: No. Because the one time when we were loading on board ship with some Seabees, they had two trailers -- they were identical -- and when they were putting it on board the ship, one of the cables broke and the trailer went down. Had no idea whether that was mine or the Seabees --

CB: Oh my.

LZ: -- until about two weeks later. And then after we unloaded, I found mine. Mine was OK. The Seabee was the guy that lost his.

CB: Oh my. How was the food and the living conditions for y'all? Were things for you sort of, you know -- did they - - not bad or good?

LZ: Oh no. I would say it was pretty good. We didn't have any fresh eggs or things like that for a long time, but we had a cook there who was an excellent cook. We had the dehydrated potatoes. And he was the kind of a cook that would go in the night before, start getting this stuff ready and soak it up and all. So we knew when he was cooking because that was the best food we got. When we did

get in a shipment of eggs, everybody went for breakfast and got eggs and he said, "I'll cook eggs as long as you guys will eat them." He finally told he had to shut it off because he had to get lunch ready. (laughs)

CB: Oh my. How was the morale? I mean how did the guys get along? I mean you see, you know -- I don't know, I wasn't there. But you get the impression that it was basically pretty good.

LZ: Oh yes. Yes. Everybody had a group. Usually the fellows that you were in the tent with were your closest friends. And so there were a lot of groups around. There were four of us that had been together for quite some time. And that was a strange thing when we got discharged, with the four us. One of them went to California, one went to Florida, the other one went to Niagara Falls, and I went to Chicago. (laughs) We're all over the country. But I did see two of them afterward. But they're all dead now. One of them had a heart attack, the other one had -- they found him dead on the road. He was riding a motorcycle, and they have no idea what happened to him. And the fellow in Florida, I don't know what he died from, but he got sick and died.

CB: So you're the last of the --

LZ: I'm the last one.

CB: -- I see. Is there anybody of that era or so forth that you see once in a while? Or you're just sort of the last, huh?

LZ: I don't know where to contact anybody. I suppose there are fellows there that are still going.

CB: Where you live in Chicago, in the suburb, are there other World War II veterans around that you see now and then?

LZ: Oh yes. I joined the VFW. In fact, I was still in the service when I joined it and I think I'm a 60-year member or something like that now. But I've been active in the VFW. I've been through all the chairs. I was commander for two years. And I did meet a fellow there who was on one of the ships that was transporting us. And I can't remember the name of the ship right now, but he was a permanent member of that crew.

CB: I see.

LZ: He told me he spent the entire war on board that ship.

CB: Wow.

LZ: And I said, "Well, what happened to the ship?" He said, "I have no idea." He said, "When I got discharged, I never heard." He said, "I suppose I could find out, but I don't know if I want to." (laughs)

CB: Do you flashback occasionally? Does something trigger a memory from a time back then?

LZ: Oh yes. Yes. That happens every now and then.

CB: Can you think of one that appeared more than once?

LZ: Well, one of the times I was seeing -- it was a war movie about the South Pacific and I had some pretty good dreams that night.

CB: Oh boy. Yes.

LZ: But every now and then, I'll see something that will remind me of it. And when we came here to the museum, the thing I wanted to see was the F4Us, because that's what we had in our outfit all the time. And at that time, they were one of the fastest planes and they were -- yes, I saw that. They were one of the planes that --

CB: Is that the right thing?

LZ: -- that's it.

CB: I know it as a Corsair, but it's the F4U, correct?

LZ: Yes.

CB: I see.

LZ: Yes. The F4U is a Corsair. They made several different kinds. The F4U was the ones that we had. They did make an F6U and they made several other planes. And Charles Lindbergh was an executive at the company that made the Corsair and he was on the islands one time to help the New Zealand people learn how to land it, because that plane --

with the big engine and the four-bladed prop -- if they bounced, they went over on the nose.

CB: Really?

LZ: So.

CB: So you actually -- did you see him there or?

LZ: Yes. I saw him because --

CB: Well, that's pretty exciting. I want to write that down here. Tell me about that. Tell me about that contact with Lindbergh.

LZ: Well, he came over to, like I say, to teach the New Zealand flyers how to land it properly. And I'm sure -- well, I think he was a marvelous pilot to start with, but when he was showing them to get the tail down when you land, it looked to me like he was getting that tail wheel down first.

CB: So you actually saw him personally land these planes?

LZ: Oh yes, because they came over and got a command car from us to drive him around.

CB: So did you get up close? Did you ever speak with him or anything like that?

LZ: Never got to speak with him, no. But --

CB: But you saw him up front?

LZ: -- I brought the command car over there. We went over in two vehicles so we could leave the command car and then get

back. And he was there. I saw him. I was probably within 20 feet or so.

CB: He was a pretty big man, wasn't he?

LZ: He was. Yes. Tall, tall fellow. And he was quite a guy.

CB: And what other things? You say he could land that thing almost on the tail thing?

LZ: Well, I was on an auxiliary crash crew on this island of Emirau, and when he was teaching them -- and knowing that they were having problems landing -- they brought us out along with the regular crash crew. And watching him come down, it looked like he'd get that tail wheel down first. And talking to one of the fellows at the museum, he said, "Well, that's the way they have to land them carriers in order to get that hook caught." So he said, "He must have been good at it." And he was good.

CB: So he impressed you as being a pretty hot pilot?

LZ: He was good at everything he did. (laughs) And when he was there, he was usually associated with -- oh, I think it was three of the fellows from one of the other squadrons who were aces. It was Major Carl, I think it was Major [Sand?], and Major Foss.

CB: Joe Foss.

LZ: Joe Foss.

CB: Twenty-eight -- 29 kills from -- made governor of --

LZ: South Dakota.

CB: South --

LZ: Or North Dakota, I forgot which.

CB: Well, what the heck? One of those, huh?

LZ: One of them. (laughs)

CB: So he was with Joe Foss at the time in the --

LZ: Yes. And Joe Foss, on this plane, he had a string of Japanese flags on it.

CB: Did you see him often or at all?

LZ: I saw him quite often, but never to speak with him.

CB: Mm-hmm. Did you see him fly, take off, or anything like that?

LZ: Yes.

CB: You knew which plane was his because of all those things on there, huh?

LZ: Yes. (laughs) Yes. You could only see him when he was taxiing because the flags were fairly small.

CB: Which island was that now, when you saw that?

LZ: Well, I think that was on Emirau also.

CB: Also on Emirau.

LZ: When we went there, we went in with the Seabees and we were standing guard while the Seabees built the airstrip. And being all coral on the island, really all they had to do was bulldoze it flat.

CB: And it was a good landing field? Those were good?

LZ: It was good.

CB: How'd they do in rain, OK? Were they good and solid in rain and everything else, like concrete?

LZ: No, it just ran off or soaked in, I don't know which.

CB: So you actually saw Joe Foss, you saw Charles Lindbergh, and you saw them fly their airplanes?

LZ: Yes. Yes.

CB: Was there any knowledge of the fact that Roosevelt really didn't like Lindbergh very much?

LZ: No, we never heard anything about that. I've read things about him since, I've heard --

CB: Did Lindbergh work with the American forces much or just the New Zealanders in your?

LZ: Well, he was with the American forces. I mean he was the special guest there. But he actually worked with the New Zealand pilots and the New Zealand pilots were absolute experts in the air, but they had to learn how to land that (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

CB: Land that big monster, huh?

LZ: -- because when they would go out on a patrol, they'd come back every time they shot down an enemy plane. When they'd come back, they'd do the victory roll over the strip. And

some of those guys would come back and do three victory rolls before they would land.

CB: Oh, right. And that was at Emirau, mostly, that you saw all that?

LZ: Yes. And when they did that victory roll, we all said, "Keep it up off the ground." They were so close.

CB: Really?

LZ: They were good at flying, but they had to learn how to land it. Because apparently that engine -- it was a big one and it was so heavy with the rest of the plane, that they couldn't let that plane bounce. They had to land it. They couldn't bounce it into the land.

CB: So you really had to fly?

LZ: Yes. I guess they'd fly it right to the strip. (laughs)

CB: Well that's very interesting that you got to see Joe Foss and these planes. You know, these things are probably second nature to you, but quite exciting to anybody who will listen to this, that you were able to attest to their ability.

LZ: Yes.

CB: These guys were good, huh?

LZ: The other fellow that I had a lot of respect for was Admiral Halsey. Bill Halsey.

CB: OK. And you listened to him a couple of times?

LZ: Oh, I've heard him several times. Yes. And --

CB: How did he sound? How did he impress you at the time?

LZ: Well, he always told us when we got to Japan, he was going to ride the emperor's white horse through the streets of Tokyo. But I think it was MacArthur that put it a stop to it because that would have been an insult. And he never got to do that. And when they were signing the papers on board the *Missouri*, Bill Halsey wasn't there. They said he was sick. And we were wondering whether he was kept away because he may insult all of them. (laughs)

CB: He was not a diplomat?

LZ: No, he wasn't a diplomat, but he was Admiral Nimitz's muscle. He was the muscleman; Nimitz was the brain.

CB: I see. So Halsey was sent in there to do it, huh?

LZ: Yes. Yes. Well, like I said, I think Nimitz was the brain on everything and when Halsey was assigned to something, it got done.

CB: Did his men have great respect for him?

LZ: Yes, they did. They had respect for him and they also feared him. (laughs)

CB: Yes. Sounds like Patton almost. "I don't want them to love me, I want them to fear me." (laughs)

LZ: Don't get on the wrong side of Bill Halsey.

CB: He'd carry a grudge.

LZ: And some of the other admirals that were with him -- I can't remember their names right now, but Nimitz had quite a Naval operation there. And with the F4U that we had, there were times they could go out and land on a ship, if the ship was somewhere close by, just as a visit. And a couple times, they'd come back with a few extra bottles of beer in their plane. So when they'd do that, we'd all get an extra beer. (laughs)

CB: Were those F4Us difficult to maintain to keep them flying? Were they maintenance monsters or could you keep them going pretty good?

LZ: Well, I didn't work on the planes themselves, but the fellows that did were pretty well satisfied with them. In fact, I think they were happy with them. The big complaint they had, though, was that the F4U was always out there doing battle and when they'd come back, they'd have to patch bullet holes on the wings. And they said, "Now we got to work all night so that plane can fly tomorrow."
(laughs)

CB: Oh boy. So they had the self-sealing tanks and all that kind of stuff that a --

LZ: Yes. And they also carried -- oh, I can't remember the name of it. It was an auxiliary --

CB: Auxiliary tanks.

LZ: -- tanks that they could drop. I think those tanks held something like 100 gallons or something, and so it gave them a lot more range than they could use. The auxiliary tanks.

CB: Well, I imagine they used an awful lot of fuel with that engine.

LZ: Yes, they did. Yes. Big engine like that. And it was a lot of fuel.

CB: Who was making the engine for that at that time? Was that a Packard engine by any chance? I don't know.

LZ: I don't think it was. I don't think it was Packard. But I don't remember. And I've intended several times to see what company it was that made it, because Lindbergh being an executive there, but I've never looked it up. And one of the island I was on, we didn't have any vehicles and so they didn't need me and my trailer, so they asked me if I would do another job. I said, "Sure." I mean it beats sitting around doing nothing, you know? So I got a job towing the F4Us. We would hook up by their front wheels with a wide type of a hitch and we had a tow motor that went slow. When the pilots would come back, they would land them, and get them over close, and shut everything off, and then they would go in and make their report. And then it was my job to hook up to that plane and bring it

out and put on the line. And that had to be a straight line right down the whole works.

CB: Did you all ever get attacked when these planes were parked? Did the Japanese ever come at you?

LZ: No.

CB: Pretty cleaned out by then, huh?

LZ: Pretty cleaned out and I think, too, with the F4U, they didn't want to attack with plane because the F4U was better. If they got them off the ground, they could protect us real good. And I did get to know one of the pilots real well and he asked me one time if I would go out and call cadence. I said, "For who?" He said, "For the pilots." I said, "I would prefer not to," because here I am, a PFC, and calling cadence for all the pilots who are officers. I said, "I didn't think that would go over too well."

CB: You were all pretty young kids at the time, even the pilots, weren't they?

LZ: Yes. Yes.

CB: How old were they? Just 21, 22?

LZ: In that area, yes. Because the platoon that I was in in boot camp, I was the old man.

CB: And you were how old?

LZ: Twenty-four.

CB: Wow. Did Boyington ever come around? Did you anywhere seem him at all? Because he was one of these big F4U pilots.

LZ: I don't believe I ever saw him, but I did see some of the planes that were in his squadron. If they were in the area and they needed fuel, they'd land, you know?

CB: I see. But was he well known at the time, though? People knew who he was?

LZ: Well, when you say Pappy Boyington, everybody knew who you were talking about. (laughs)

CB: That's amazing. And he was about 30 or something like that, so he was really old, wasn't he?

LZ: Yes.

CB: By standards, yes.

LZ: Yes.

CB: Well, that's amazing. You were around a lot of things happening.

LZ: Well, I never did count how many islands I was on, because being in the service squadron, we weren't needed until the rest of the squadrons got the use of the field and all that. So they would use us for anything. And a couple of times, they took our whole squadron and put us somewhere near a battle. We would be back up if they needed it, but they never needed us. (laughs)

CB: Aw. Well, that's very interesting. Did you ever write anything about your experiences or lecture to anybody about what you saw, anybody --

LZ: No, not really.

CB: Nobody smart enough to ask you to talk, huh?

LZ: (laughs) Well, they do at the VFW. But everybody's in the VFW got experiences, you know? Sometimes we'll mention an incident here or there, but they've all had their own experiences. And we have been asked -- and I never did it -- but our VFW Post had been asked several times if we would send some of the guys over to the schools and lecture to kids and let the kids ask questions. I never got in on that.

CB: Well, that's excellent. Anything else you'd like to tell us about that we didn't -- we dug pretty deep here into your background, didn't we?

LZ: Yes, we did.

CB: And, boy, it's exciting for me personally to listen to it and I'm sure it will be to people after me, also.

LZ: Well, so many times the little incidents that happened -- all together, I think I was on seven different ships as we moved from island to island and there was always some sort of an incident on the ships. We were in a convoy at one time and we got a submarine alert. And I didn't know at

the time but I learned real quick, with a submarine alert, everybody gets up on deck because a torpedo's going to hit down below water. And --

CB: That makes a lot of sense.

LZ: Yes, it does. And if it's an air attack, you go down below. If you're a passenger and not part of the crew.

CB: And they teach you that real quick?

LZ: Yes.

CB: As part of your briefing, you know?

LZ: When they put us up on deck with the submarine alert, we got to see the destroyers go out there after that sub and I was amazed at what they can do.

CB: Did they really see one and find it?

LZ: We don't know if they found it, but they went through in a sort of a pattern -- I think there were three of them -- some sort of a pattern and they were throwing the depth charges overboard. You know, they'd fire like barrels when they go over. And we didn't feel anything from it, but we could see where sometimes the water would go up when one of them went off. But I don't know if they ever got the submarine or not. But it was a big convoy and having the destroyers there was a big help, because it kept the whole convoy safe.

CB: Yes. Made it a little more comfortable with them out there. Did you ever get strafed by any aircraft or anything like that on those?

LZ: No, we didn't get any aircraft attacks when we were on board ship. Again, on the island of Emirau, a Jap plane came over, oh, for a while it was almost every night. We called him Washing Machine Charlie.

CB: Oh, boy.

LZ: Because it was black all the time, had no lights or anything, but we assumed he could see the island because of the waves coming up on the -- what do you call it?

CB: Whitecaps?

LZ: The whitecaps. And you'd see the -- it's almost like a light. And he would drop a couple of small bombs, hoping he'd hit the island. He didn't have any target in particular.

CB: What year was that you were on Emirau? Can you recall roughly what years that was?

LZ: Oh, let's see. Must have been '44, because I was back home. Well, in fact, I was back home when Germany surrendered. I was home on a furlough and I couldn't walk past a tavern that day without being invited in. (laughs)

CB: And you had to do it. I mean you had to accept the hospitality.

LZ: (laughs) Oh, absolutely.

CB: Turn it down, you'd insult somebody, right?

LZ: Yes. Besides that, we were always thirsty. (laughs)

CB: Well, you're a pretty tall guy. How big were you back then? You look like you're a pretty tall man.

LZ: Well, at that time, I was probably around 170. Now I'm around 200.

CB: How tall were you?

LZ: Six foot.

CB: That's a pretty big guy in that time, though, wasn't it? I mean --

LZ: Yes.

CB: -- taller than most people?

LZ: Yes. When we were in the platoon and had to line up, it was the tall guys in front, and it just all tapered down. The small guys were in back, and they were called candy merchants. (laughs)

CB: (laughs) Yes. I'm always surprised at how much taller people are now, you know? The kids then, back in World War II, I see these uniforms, and they're not very tall people, you know?

LZ: Yes. Then when I came back and got my furlough and was transferred to North Carolina, I was there when the war ended with Japan. And the Marine Corps camp at Cherry

Point was so close, and then there were other camps around, that the town was just loaded. And my wife was there with me at that time, so we were getting ready to eat. We had rented a room and she had a frying pan on a little stove that we had with pork chops in it. When we heard the news, we went out. We didn't see the pork chops until the next morning. (laughs) Everything was shut off. But the town celebrated all night. The fire department closed up all their doors so the Marines wouldn't get in there. And there were so many of them around, they said, "We're going to take all our trucks out through the streets. Anybody that can find a place to hang on, you're welcome."

(laughs) So it was quite a celebration.

CB: Never forget that day, huh?

LZ: Yes.

CB: You still have your wife?

LZ: No, she died about eight years ago.

CB: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. I'm sorry. But so you were married during the war then? Yes.

LZ: Well, let's see. Yes. Yes. It was after Pearl Harbor, just before I went into the Marine Corps. That's a long time ago.

CB: Well, it's been a real pleasure, Mr. Zaehler, to hear your story. I certainly hope I operated the tape recorder correctly. I hope you enjoyed telling us about --

LZ: Yes.

CB: -- we're very honored that you would take the time.

LZ: Well, I was honored to be asked to do this. And I got to tell you now, at this time, I'm 90 years old, and I feel like I'm in excellent shape.

END OF AUDIO FILE