

*National Museum of the Pacific War*

*Nimitz Education and Research Center*

*Fredericksburg, Texas*

Telephone Interview with

**Mr. Jack First**

Date of Interview: June 3, 2010

# **National Museum of the Pacific War**

## **Fredericksburg, Texas**

### **Telephone Interview with Mr. Jack First**

Telephone Interview in progress.

Ed Metzler: This is Ed Metzler; today is the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June, 2010. I'm interviewing by telephone Mr. Jack First; he's located in Rapid City, South Dakota, and I am located in Fredericksburg, Texas at the Nimitz Museum. This interview is in support of the Center of Pacific War Studies, archives for National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, for the preservation of historical information related to this site. So I want to start out first, Jack, thanking you for spending your time on the phone today to share your experiences with you, and let's get it started by having you give us your full name; date and place of birth and then we'll just take it from there.

Mr. First: Okay, my name is Jack First; no middle initial. I was born in Conneaut Lake, Pennsylvania...

Ed Metzler: Can you...can you spell that?

Mr. First: ...in 1921.

Ed Metzler: Excuse me, Jack, could you spell that town's name for us, please?

Mr. First: C-o-n-n-e-a-u-t-h-t [s/b Conneaut]...

Ed Metzler: Wow! I'm glad I...

Mr. First: ...Lake.

Ed Metzler: Okay, good; I'm glad I asked; we never would have guessed it (chuckle).  
Okay, I'm sorry and what was the date.

Mr. First: Uh, December 4<sup>th</sup>, 1921.

Ed Metzler: Okay, so what did your dad and mother do for a living?

Mr. First: Oh, my dad and mother were pharmacists, and uh, my father was a pharmacist...before they were licensed, and then all of a sudden licensing came. And since he had not gone to school for this and had done it by...apprenticing, my mother went to the University of Pittsburgh and got a Pharmacist License.

Ed Metzler: Hmm! Well, that was a bit unusual back then for a female to be practicing as a pharmacist, wasn't it?

Mr. First: Yes.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, and what about brothers and sisters, Jack?

Mr. First: None.

Ed Metzler: Okay, so you're the only child?

Mr. First: Yes.

Ed Metzler: And were you spoiled or not? They say they all are.

Mr. First: I suppose so.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter), and did you...stay in the same town that you were born in when you grew up or did you move around or what?

Mr. First: No, we moved around; my father later on was a representative for drug companies and we lived in Buffalo and in...uh, let's see...in Canada we lived in...uh, gee, I can't think of the name of the town...started with "M."

Ed Metzler: So you were (unintelligible).

Mr. First: Montreal!

Ed Metzler: Montreal, oh yeah.

Mr. First: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: So you were over in Canada as well?

Mr. First: Yes.

Ed Metzler: In fact, you almost have to speak French if you're in Montreal, huh?

Mr. First: Yeah, I spoke a bit of it when I was a kid.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, yeah. And so when you ended up in secondary school and high school and the like...where did you go to high school or did you go all around?

Mr. First: In Englewood, California.

Ed Metzler: My word, you got out to the west coast as well!

Mr. First: Yes.

Ed Metzler: Hmm. When did you move to California?

Mr. First: About 1930.

Ed Metzler: Okay, so you were like...eight or nine years old, huh?

Mr. First: Yeah, something like that.

Ed Metzler: Yeah. And so, let's see, if you were born in '21 then that means you were probably getting out of high school in...like '39 or...?

Mr. First: Yes, in '39.

Ed Metzler: Alright, and what...what did you do then?

Mr. First: I went on to UCLA and...was there only one year.

Ed Metzler: So...while you were a freshman there then, I guess, okay...so you went off in 1939, so you...so after one year at UCLA what did you do then?

Mr. First: I worked for Northrop Aircraft.

Ed Metzler: Okay. And had the war started yet when you went to work for Northrop?

Mr. First: No.

Ed Metzler: Okay, and so what were you doing at Northrop?

Mr. First: I was...doing...assembly.

Ed Metzler: So what aircraft were you working on...were you assembling there?

Mr. First: We were making nacelles for the B-17s.

Ed Metzler: Uhm...my, and so you were there when the war started or had you moved to another...

Mr. First: Yes, I was there when the war started; we went on a seven-day, twelve hour...uh, twelve hour-shifts, seven days a week.

Ed Metzler: Uhm!

Mr. First: And, until women came in, we stayed there in that...then when...there were enough women to take over, I went to...into the Marine Corps.

Ed Metzler: Oh okay. About how long then was it after the war started before the women could really...(unintelligible)?

Mr. First: It was May...I enlisted in May...something, 22<sup>nd</sup> probably of '42.

Ed Metzler: Okay, so...so where...you enlisted out there in California and you went...to the Marines, right?

Mr. First: Yes.

Ed Metzler: Why the Marines?

Mr. First: Uhm, I can't even remember why (chuckles).

Ed Metzler: Just...seemed like the thing to do, huh?

Mr. First: Yeah, it did.

Ed Metzler: Yeah. So, did you go with anybody else? Like...I've talked to a lot of veterans that go with their buddies and they all go down and join together and (unintelligible).

Mr. First: No, no, I went by myself.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, yeah. And so, where did you do your basic...training?

Mr. First: In San Diego.

Ed Metzler: Okay, so...right in the...fairly close to home, huh?

Mr. First: Yes.

Ed Metzler: What was basic training like for you?

Mr. First: Oh, like...everybody...the Drill Instructors were...we thought they were terrible, but they were...really...pretty good.

Ed Metzler: Well, they're supposed to be terrible, I think.

Mr. First: Yeah, that's right.

Ed Metzler: Because they're supposed to be preparing you for what's going to be terrible.

Mr. First: Uh hum.

Ed Metzler: So...so what was the hardest part for you in basic training, the physical, you know, exercise or what?

Mr. First: Oh, the exercise was hard for everybody. I think everybody that came into that boot camp...much...in much better condition than they went in.

Ed Metzler: Yeah. So...what, I guess, what are you typically...what...twelve to sixteen weeks or something like that in boot camp or...I can't...

Mr. First: Uh, thirteen weeks.

Ed Metzler: Thirteen weeks, and I guess you're getting what...marksmanship and...

Mr. First: Yes, uh hum.

Ed Metzler: ...marching...

Mr. First: Then we went to Camp Matthews to qualify with the rifle and other weapons.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum, but at this point, you don't have any idea where in the Marines you're going to end up or...what your roll will be, do you?

Mr. First: No, I had no idea.

Ed Metzler: Did you have a preference for what you might be doing or where you would be going?

Mr. First: Well, I was...I had worked as an apprentice gunsmith before the...before the war...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. First: ...and I wanted to do Ordnance which I finally got.

Ed Metzler: Uhm, but that's not where you started out, huh?

Mr. First: No, I started out...out...as a Private.

Ed Metzler: Well, okay, let's...let's go to then when you...when you got out of basic training...then where did they assign you and what happened?

Mr. First: I was assigned to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Anti-Tank Battalion, and sent down to New Zealand.

Ed Metzler: Now this was in the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines Division?

Mr. First: No.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mr. First: No, this was...we were attached to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division.

Ed Metzler: Okay. So, off you went to New Zealand...then that was what...in late '42, huh?

Mr. First: Yeah, probably...probably about the middle of the summer, I imagine.

Ed Metzler: Okay. So, just an old troop ship or what...how did you get down there?

Mr. First: Yeah, we went...yeah, the name of the ship was the [USS] Mormet Port.

Ed Metzler: Hmm, was it like...well like a liberty ship, a troop ship or what?

Mr. First: It was a troop ship, yes.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, yeah. So had you ever been at sea before...when you got on that ship?

Mr. First: No.

Ed Metzler: That's a new...this is new territory for you then?

Mr. First: Uh hum.

Ed Metzler: So, what's going through your mind as you climb on this troop ship and you're headed out to parts unknown?

Mr. First: Gee, I can't even remember (chuckles).

Ed Metzler: Well, and how long did it...let's see, that's a long haul; did you go straight down to New Zealand...from...?

Mr. First: Yeah, we did. Yeah, we took about...about twenty days as I recall.

Ed Metzler: Hmm. Yeah, as I remember, they do a lot of zig zagging (chuckle) when they go just to avoid things like Japanese submarines, so...that tends to slow you down.

Mr. First: Yeah, we were by ourselves and I don't remember any...any zig zagging.



Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. First: And the...the trip was very calm till we got to Auckland...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. First: ...in New Zealand. We went...stayed there overnight and went to...went down to Wellington.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. First: And that trip down to Wellington was...in a storm. Everybody was very proud of themselves that they had...gone for twenty days without being seasick, but there was a lot of sick ones that night.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, how about you?

Mr. First: No, I didn't get...I don't get seasick.

Ed Metzler: That is...that's great! A lot of people do.

Mr. First: Uh hum.

Ed Metzler: So down to Wellington then, is that correct?

Mr. First: Yes.

Ed Metzler: And so you got of the ship there and what did they do with you?

Mr. First: We trained as an anti-tank battalion, and...before...we were training to go with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division in...on Tarawa; however, they decided that there were no tanks to shoot, so we didn't go, and the battalion was broken up.

Ed Metzler: Hmm.

Mr. First: And I went to...uh, let's see...can't think of the name of the island.

Ed Metzler: To New Guinea?

Mr. First: No, it wasn't New Guinea. Hmm, just can't remember!

Ed Metzler: Yeah. Uh,so...so how long were you in New Zealand? Was that just a...couple of months or a fairly...

Mr. First: Oh, we were there about eight months.

Ed Metzler: Oh, my gosh! So what was it like being in New Zealand?

Mr. First: Oh, it was a very nice place.

Ed Metzler: How so?

Mr. First: Oh, the liberty was good, and the food was good. They had lots of steak and eggs!

Ed Metzler: (Laughter), well I was going to ask you if they made you eat a bunch of mutton because I've heard a lot of complaining (laughter) about that.

Mr. First: Yeah, we...we had mutton in our own...uh, mess.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. First: But we also had a lot of venison...'cause there was an over-supply of deer which...they always had there.

Ed Metzler: Hmm! So was the venison very good?

Mr. First: Oh yes!

Ed Metzler: Really?!

Mr. First: Much better than the mutton.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, well probably anything's better than the mutton. So how did the New Zealanders treat you Yanks?

Mr. First: Oh, they treated us quite well; no problems.

Ed Metzler: Did you ever get out and mix much with the...the natives, so to speak?

Mr. First: Oh yes, sure. Yeah, we had...we had liberty a fair amount.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum. And did you ever...I...I've talked to some veterans who said that...sometimes they were invited, you know, not individually, but maybe small groups of them into some of the homes of the...this in both Australia or New Zealand...just for...for a meal or something; did that ever happen to you?

Mr. First: No, but I had a girl there.

Ed Metzler: Oh, a girlfriend?

Mr. First: Yes, and we...ate together a lot.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. First: So on.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, yeah. So after your eight-month stint there then off you went to these islands.

Mr. First: Yeah, I was trying to...look in here on some facts I have (pause). Let's see (pause). Now I can't...can't remember...

Ed Metzler: Well that's alright, that's alright.

Mr. First: ...remember the name of that island, but at...at any rate, it was just a way stop and then I was...was sent back to the United States to join the Fifth Division.

Ed Metzler: Okay, because at the time you went to this island, what...Division were you assigned to...because you weren't assigned to the Second.

Mr. First: I...I wasn't assigned to anything.

Ed Metzler: Oh.

Mr. First: It was just a way stop.

Ed Metzler: Alright, alright, and so you stayed there...what...for just a short period of time, huh?

Mr. First: Probably a couple of months.

Ed Metzler: Okay, okay. So...this was more tropical then I assume rather than New Zealand which is, you know, more...

Mr. First: Yes, that's true.

Ed Metzler: So we know it wasn't...

Mr. First: It was...it was a French island.

Ed Metzler: Ah, okay. Did...did you have problems with insects and disease and that kind of thing there?

Mr. First: No.

Ed Metzler: Okay, so no malaria or you didn't have to...did you have to take those malaria pills that they gave you?

Mr. First: Yes, I took them, uh hum.

Ed Metzler: And did you turn yellow like everybody else?

Mr. First: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter), but fortunately you didn't...didn't get malaria because that's a mess! So then you got sent back to the States?

Mr. First: Yes.

Ed Metzler: Okay, you and a bunch of other folks?

Mr. First: Yeah, there's fellows coming from everywhere; they were...the Fifth Division was made up of...ex-Raiders and ex-Paratroops and new people, and I went into the...28<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Company E.

Ed Metzler: Okay, I'm listening; go ahead.

Mr. First: And...

Ed Metzler: So this is just when they were forming the...the Fifth then, wasn't it?

Mr. First: Yes, uh hum.

Ed Metzler: So is this...this must be in...'43...sometime in '43 then?

Mr. First: Yeah, about...yeah, probably was.

Ed Metzler: And so, where did you go; back to San Diego...to do that?

Mr. First: To Camp Pendleton.

Ed Metzler: Okay, Camp Pendleton. I can't remember...where is Camp Pendleton up in the Bay area or down in the L.A....?

Mr. First: No, it's between San Diego and Los Angeles.

Ed Metzler: Okay, so it's in southern California. So, what did they do; just put you up in barracks there while they were forming?

Mr. First: No, in tents.

Ed Metzler: In tents, uhm. Well, I guess you can get away with that in southern California.

Mr. First: Oh yes.

Ed Metzler: And...so how are they feeding you about this time; pretty good food or...?

Mr. First: Yeah, so so.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, not...

Mr. First: Noth...nothing special.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, but you didn't starve to death.

Mr. First: No.

Ed Metzler: Now did...were you in...fairly close contact with, you know, with your family during all of this or, I mean, did you get letters; send letters or...?

Mr. First: Well, I went up on liberty out to Los Angeles which is...near Englewood.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. First: So I saw my father at that time.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum, uh hum. And...okay, so the Fifth Marines are being formed. So did you have to go back through basic training again or something equivalent to it or...?

Mr. First: No, well, we...didn't do...go through basic; we just...we did a lot of training.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum. Alright, just the...the same type of thing – marksmanship and...exercise?

Mr. First: Yeah, and field maneuvers and a lot of hiking.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum. And at this point, you didn't know...what your role was going to be in the Fifth Marines either, did you or did you?

Mr. First: Yeah, I was already an...an Ordnance man.

Ed Metzler: So what does an Ordnance man do?

Mr. First: Well, he takes care of the guns for the Company.

Ed Metzler: Okay, so you're talking about...small arms?

Mr. First: Yes, uh hum.

Ed Metzler: Alright, so rifles, pistols, side arms, that kind of stuff?

Mr. First: Yeah, and machine guns and mortars.

Ed Metzler: Okay. And so when you say take care of them, does that mean...what...exactly is that...mean?

Mr. First: Oh, if they have problems, I'm supposed to fix them.

Ed Metzler: Okay. So, so that's finally getting into the area where you wanted to be, isn't it?

Mr. First: Yes, uh hum. Yeah, there was one Ordnance man per Company...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. First: ...so that's just where I wanted to be.

Ed Metzler: Now at this time were you...what...still a Private First Class or what were you?

Mr. First: I was a Corporal by this time.

Ed Metzler: Ah, alright. And...so...what happened to the Fifth Marines? When did they go out into the combat zone?

Mr. First: Well, we first went over to Hawaii and we were based on the large island...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. First: ...up at the...ranch there.

Ed Metzler: Parker (sp?) Ranch (unintelligible)?

Mr. First: Yeah, and we...did training for Iwo Jima.

Ed Metzler: At the time, you didn't know anything about Iwo Jima, huh?

Mr. First: No, we...the only...the only thing that was different...our Company was...doing a lot of attacking hills.

Ed Metzler: Hmm, so you figured there were some hills in your future, huh?

Mr. First: Yeah, there was...Suribachi!

Ed Metzler: Yeah! Yeah, speaking of hills, yeah! So...about how long were you on the big island then?

Mr. First: Oh probably...a few months.

Ed Metzler: So was that pretty easy going for you or was this a...pretty strenuous or how...how did that work out?

Mr. First: Oh that was...there was lots of hiking and...lots of attacking hills; training with...the weapons that each person was going to use.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum. And...what about...did you get any liberties or...free time, and if you did, I don't know where you would go.

Mr. First: Uh, we'd go down to Hilo.

Ed Metzler: Okay, not quite as big as...or exciting as Honolulu, but I guess not bad, huh?

Mr. First: Not bad.

Ed Metzler: And...did you have any...buddies that you had kind of, you know, become acquainted with; people that you kind of hung out with there or how did that...how was that working?

Mr. First: Well, I was...being in Ordnance, I was in the Headquarters Platoon...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. First: ...and I had friends there, and I also had a friend in the...the adjoining Company F, and he was the Ordnance man for that Company.

Ed Metzler: About how many...soldiers in a Company; I can't remember?

Mr. First: Oh, about two hundred and fifty, I guess...

Ed Metzler: Alright, okay.

Mr. First: ...as I recall.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, alright, so you have got a lot of...firearms to keep your eye on...take care of, don't you?

Mr. First: Yes, uh hum.



Ed Metzler: Hmm. So after...the big island, then where...where were you guys off to?

Mr. First: Uh, we got aboard ship and...went to Kwajalein.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. First: And as I recall, we transferred from the transports to attack ships at...at Kwajalein and went up to Iwo Jima.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum, so Iwo Jima was your first real taste of combat then, huh?

Mr. First: Yes, uh hum.

Ed Metzler: So all of this must be going...early '45...'cause (unintelligible).

Mr. First: No, it was...yeah, February 19<sup>th</sup> of '45.

Ed Metzler: Right, seemed to me like the initial attack on...in Iwo was like February 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup>...right in there.

Mr. First: No, it was the 19<sup>th</sup>.

Ed Metzler: 19<sup>th</sup>! Well, doggone it, I missed it by a day or two. Yeah, I bet you remember that day though!

Mr. First: Yes, I do.

Ed Metzler: So, by the time you're on the attack ships...now what kind of an attack ship are we talking about; a landing craft?

Mr. First: LST.

Ed Metzler: Alright, LSTs, yeah.

Mr. First: Then we got...got into small boats from there.

Ed Metzler: Yeah. So at this point you now know where you're headed because they usually tell you after you leave your last port...before you arrive...

Mr. First: Oh yes, yes, we knew then.

Ed Metzler: And...what...did they do much explaining to you on what Iwo...how big it was; what the lay out was; where (unintelligible)?

Mr. First: Oh yes. Yeah, they had...they had maps and they had little...what do you...what would you call them...little...?

Ed Metzler: Almost models, huh?

Mr. First: Yeah, models.

Ed Metzler: Lay out...three...three dimensional models of the island?

Mr. First: Yes, uh hum.

Ed Metzler: Rather strange shaped island, isn't it?

Mr. First: Yeah, it's kind of like a pork chop.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, with that funny thing on the end of it.

Mr. First: Yeah, Suribachi.

Ed Metzler: Yeah. So how are they preparing you...emotionally for this? Are they saying, "Hey, it's going to be tough," or "We think we should be able to do it in three or four days." How...how did they represent it?

Mr. First: Well, they thought that we were going to take three or four days.

Ed Metzler: Hmm.

Mr. First: And it, of course, it wasn't that at all.

Ed Metzler: Yeah. What did you think of your officers?

Mr. First: Well, they were pretty good.

Ed Metzler: So you...you felt pretty competent in them and...and pleased with their leadership?

Mr. First: Oh yeah.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mr. First: I'd gotten into trouble with my Captain 'cause I...sometimes I was very...uh, open about criticizing the way they were doing things as far as the weapons go.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. First: And I had applied for flight training, and...

Ed Metzler: So you wanted to be in an airplane, huh?

Mr. First: Yeah, this was...this was...after the thing though; after Iwo.

Ed Metzler: Oh okay, well we'll get to that in a moment.

Mr. First: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: So...won't you just describe to me...what the day was like as you went in...to Iwo.

Mr. First: Oh, I think everybody was scared...as you...you should be if you're sensible.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, if you've got a head on your shoulders, you should be.

Mr. First: Yeah, and we got into these small boats; circled around until it was time to go, and we were in the second wave as I recall.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. First: And the...first wave was already ashore and nothing much was happening.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. First: And...it didn't happen until the second wave got...got ashore and then...then they opened up on us.

Ed Metzler: So...and...so your headed into shore; first wave is on shore...

Mr. First: Uh hum.

Ed Metzler: ...and there's not much resistance. So, tell me...when you hit the shore; tell me what happened.

Mr. First: Oh, our particular boat couldn't go in...for some reason couldn't go in...drop it's...or land...in front of the boat and he had to back in, so we got out in deep water and...some...some of us had tr...trouble with that...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. First: ...and...

Ed Metzler: Did you (unintelligible)?

Mr. First: ...we got ashore and we were in...into this black sand which you could...sink down in...quite a ways when you were trying to walk in it.

Ed Metzler: So it's kind of tough just to even move around in that stuff?

Mr. First: Yeah, that's true; it's...that...once you got off the beach though then it was...just...kind of rocky and regular stuff...not black sand anymore.

Ed Metzler: So was the beach fairly flat; was it steep; what was it like?

Mr. First: It drew...it was flat...for a very tiny bit and then it was steep with this black sand, and it was probably up to the...oh, if you were standing on the...uh, first part, you couldn't see over the...uh, black sand...above you.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum. So when did the resistance first start then...by the Japanese?

Mr. First: Well, they were starting...they were heavy...heavily shelling the place and they had lots of machine gun fire and perhaps rifle fire; we couldn't really tell.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum. So you're not carrying a gun; you're there to make sure everybody else's guns are functioning?

Mr. First: No, I carried a gun.

Ed Metzler: You did? Alright.

Mr. First: Yeah, I carried a BAR ashore.

Ed Metzler: Uhm! So...had to climb up the...the wall of sand, so to speak?

Mr. First: Uh hum.

Ed Metzler: And then you're up over the top...and then what?

Mr. First: Then...then we...went across the island, and by the evening we had cut the island in two. And then we turned around to face Suribachi.

Ed Metzler: Well now how much resistance did you encounter as you were crossing the island to cut it into two?

Mr. First: We had a fair amount of...block houses and had to reduce those and sometimes they'd get reduced and...then there'd be people back in them again because they had these tunnels all through the place.

Ed Metzler: Uhm.

Mr. First: And it wasn't necessarily...uh, finished when you...thought you had finished a block house.

Ed Metzler: Just when you thought it was finished, it turned out it wasn't?

Mr. First: Yeah, uh hum.

Ed Metzler: So...well, at this point, were we using the flame throwers quite a bit to help with those (unintelligible)?

Mr. First: Well, we were using the personal flame throwers, you might say; not the...not the tanks.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. First: 'Cause the tanks hadn't gotten ashore and they were still trying to get ashore.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, probably still trying to get up that wall of sand back there!

Mr. First: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: And I guess the gren...the hand grenades and those kinds of things were helpful in trying to blow them out of those...those bunkers?

Mr. First: Yeah, we had the...the flame throwers; we had...the...gee, I can't of the name of thing either...goes over the shoulder and has a rocket in it.

Ed Metzler: Oh, the bazooka-type thing?

Mr. First: Bazooka, yeah!

Ed Metzler: Right, right.

Mr. First: Yeah, we had those, and we had demolitions...heavy, heavy pack explosives, and we'd...we tried to get the people come down with rifle and BAR fire, and then get up to it; get...shoot a bazooka in the...in an opening (unintelligible), too, then get up with flame throwers, and then finally with the explosives.

Ed Metzler: Now were you finding that the Japanese were...resisting to the death; were...were there any surrenders at all; how did that go?

Mr. First: We didn't catch anybody the first day. In fact, through the whole thing, everybody totally only got about two hundred prisoners out of twenty thousand.

Ed Metzler: Hmm, and what about the...the famous charges, you know, where...like at night in particular, I think they would do these suicide charges...that I've heard of...did you experience that at all?

Mr. First: Yeah, we did, and we took care of them pretty well.

Ed Metzler: So, were...I'm assuming you were digging in with foxholes and the like, correct?

Mr. First: Oh yes. Yeah, our orders were always, "Get in your foxhole at night; don't...  
(end of tape a, side A)

Ed Metzler: ...tape 1, side 2. So, give me, if you would...just a...a description of one of those night attacks that...that you had to...to go through.

Mr. First: Oh, they usually started with a lot of yelling by the Japanese, and they were really something that...didn't work...for them. They invariably lost a lot of men.

Ed Metzler: And they didn't really overrun any positions, did they or did they?

Mr. First: No, they didn't...until...we...we laid in the campaign. There was a bunch infiltrated way back in...where...where they thought there were safe places, and they killed some Air Force people and some...some Marines and so on, and...until they got some...more Marines up there to...or back there to take care of it.

Ed Metzler: So this is behind the lines, so to speak, huh?

Mr. First: Yeah, it was.

Ed Metzler: Was it hard to even tell for sure where the line was because of all of this toing and froing going on?

Mr. First: Yeah, it...you...you were going forward and killing people, and then you had to watch your back all the time also... 'cause you never knew where they were going to come out of another tunnel.

Ed Metzler: So, as a BAR man are you right up there on the front; tell me...tell me...

Mr. First: I was for awhile, and then some BAR man was...uh, lost his gun or had it go bad, and I gave that to...him; gave my gun to him.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. First: And then I took...picked up a carbine.

Ed Metzler: So you feel a little naked with a carbine after having a BAR?

Mr. First: No (chuckle), no everybody was...all together.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum, so tell me about the BAR. Is that a real handful to try and control; is that a good weapon? Tell me about it.

Mr. First: Yeah, it's a very good weapon; you'd...you'd control it best by shooting a couple of shots at a time rather than a...a long burst.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. First: And if you had it on a...on a bipod and on the ground, well then you could use it a little more...uh, longer bursts, but...the best way to shoot it was to...shoot two or three...two, two or three shots at a time.

Ed Metzler: Yeah. That things a bit of a handful when you pull the trigger on that, isn't it?

Mr. First: Yeah, they were...a good...you...you knew you were shooting something.

Ed Metzler: (Chuckle). Now were you a big guy; small guy...having never had the chance to meet you...were...was the gun nearly as big as you are or are you big and burly or what?

Mr. First: Oh, I was five foot nine...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum, okay.

Mr. First: ...weighed about a hundred and seventy.

Ed Metzler: So you were...you were about average size then?



Mr. First: Yeah, about average.

Ed Metzler: And how many...how many rounds in a BAR before you got to reload? I'm not that familiar with (unintelligible).

Mr. First: They were twenty round magazines.

Ed Metzler: Alright, and then you had a bunch of those strapped on you to...you just...

Mr. First: Yes.

Ed Metzler: ...flip a new one in when the old one is...is empty, huh?

Mr. First: Uh hum.

Ed Metzler: Hmm. So, took you about how long to cross the island? One or two days?

Mr. First: The first...we crossed the island in the first day.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. First: At...at that very narrow point.

Ed Metzler: Right. So at this point are you saying, "Hey, maybe this isn't so bad after all?"

Mr. First: Well, that first day it wasn't...wasn't really bad.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. First: Then...then we turned...turned to our left and faced Suribachi and we had lots of...uh, lots of bad stuff there.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, tell me about Suribachi and what happened.

Mr. First: Well, it took us about five days to get up to the top, and it was our Third Platoon that went up and put the flag up.

Ed Metzler: Man!

Mr. First: And...I was at the bottom of the hill; I wasn't up on the top at all.

Ed Metzler:        Alright.

Mr. First:         I...I got up to the top later on...a day or two later.

Ed Metzler:        Uh hum.

Mr. First:         But...we...we couldn't actually see the flag because we were so close to the...close to the hill itself.

Ed Metzler:        So...

Mr. First:         But a lot of people saw them and there was a lot of ships...blowing their whistles and...people shooting off guns (chuckle).

Ed Metzler:        So by the time they got the flag up there, was Suribachi well secured or was that still...had to be...

Mr. First:         Yes, it was pretty well secured.

Ed Metzler:        Uh hum.

Mr. First:         I think they killed a couple of Japs up on top.

Ed Metzler:        Uh hum.

Mr. First:         They went up with no problem at all.

Ed Metzler:        Hmm, but it was a problem getting to Suribachi from where you started, huh?

Mr. First:         Uh hum.

Ed Metzler:        So what are we talking...hand to hand combat or more bunkers or what?

Mr. First:         It was...there was very little hand to hand combat because they were all underground, and we had...to find the places and clean them out.

Ed Metzler:        Uhm, so how...so how many days to...to secure Suribachi; several more days?

Mr. First:         Took about five days.

Ed Metzler:        So, I guess those days are all...kind of run together for you, don't they?

Mr. First: Oh yes, yes.

Ed Metzler: So what was the closest scrape that you had during that Suribachi period?

Mr. First: I don't think I had any close ones at all. I had some later on, but...

Ed Metzler: Uhm.

Mr. First: ...not then.

Ed Metzler: Well, your luck was holding out, huh?

Mr. First: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: And what about casualties from...from the other guys in your unit?

Mr. First: Well, we were taking...we were taking losses – killed and wounded. I don't know how many...for the first five days.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum. Did they have reserves that they put in to...replace the...the people lost?

Mr. First: Uh, we got about...I think about a...a hundred and twenty replacements, but they...the replacements were at a disadvantage 'cause they hadn't trained with us and they had...didn't have the total training that we had either.

Ed Metzler: Uhm. Now these were Marines though and not Army, right?

Mr. First: Yeah, they were Marines.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, hmm.

Mr. First: And the First and the Fifth...uh, the Fourth and Fifth Divisions landed on the first day and the Third Division was still in reserve aboard ship. And after about ten or twelve days, I think, they brought...brought two Regiments of the Third Division ashore 'cause they...we were really having trouble.

Ed Metzler: Hmm. Now during this period of time, are you finding a big need for you as the Ordnance man to repair...

Mr. First: No, no, there was none...none of that; didn't...

Ed Metzler: (Unintelligible words).

Mr. First: ...repair anything.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, there wasn't time.

Mr. First: It was...there was plenty of guns and...

Ed Metzler: Plenty of ammunition.

Mr. First: Yeah, uh hum.

Ed Metzler: So when the first guys got up on top of Suribachi, you were unable to see the flag 'cause you were right down there at the steep base of the hill, is that the way (unintelligible).

Mr. First: Yes, I was...uh hum.

Ed Metzler: But I suspect that your...crossed your lips as well, huh?

Mr. First: Oh yes, we knew the flag was up and we were very pleased with that. We thought, in fact, it was going to get easier, but it didn't.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, that's what...I seem to...remember hearing. Now there's been a whole lot...written and talked about...number of flags that were raised at Suribachi and the first one was a smaller one and then it was replaced...and the guys that did it, and etcetera. Uh, what was your experience; what did you observe?

Mr. First: Well, the first flag was a small one, and it was...given to our Lieutenant, our First Lieutenant, who was the Exec. He...he led the...the platoon up...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. First: ...and they put that flag up. And then they wanted a bigger one and they sent...sent that up and Joe Rosenthal took...took the picture of its raising.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. First: And that's the...the very famous picture.

Ed Metzler: Right. I...I guess you've seen the movie that...or maybe you haven't...the one that was done...what...three or four years ago that followed, you know, the guys that raised the...the flag; I think *Flag of our Fathers*, I think, was the name of it.

Mr. First: Yeah, that was done by...the...the son of the Corpsman.

Ed Metzler: That's right!

Mr. First: Brad...Bradley.

Ed Metzler: That's right. Did that...well, I guess, how realistic did you feel like that was?

Mr. First: Well, he wasn't there.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. First: And...our First Lieutenant was hired as a...a technical man for that and since they didn't take any of his recommendations, he quit.

Ed Metzler: I'll be darned! So it's still Hollywood, huh?

Mr. First: It's still Hollywood.

Ed Metzler: Yeah...darn. So after Suribachi was secured then where did you guys go?

Mr. First: Uh, we turned around a hundred and eighty degrees and went up the left side of the island.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. First: And that was...from then on was the bad part.

Ed Metzler: So what was worse about this part?

Mr. First: Well, there was a...a series of...a little...uh, small...what would you call them - not precise.

Ed Metzler: Ridges?

Mr. First: Yeah, ridges, and you'd get...get one ridge cleaned out and then there was another ridge, and there was ridge after ridge for awhile.

Ed Metzler: Uhm. So are you back with a BAR now or are you just with a...

Mr. First: No, I was using an M-1 and I carried a carbine both.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum, uh hum. So we're talking heavy combat now, is that right?

Mr. First: Yes. Yeah, after we...I remember the...the morning that I was...or the two mornings that I was the most scared...my...the Captain gave me a job of walking in front of a tank because their little phones didn't work and they couldn't...see just where they were supposed to shoot, so I was supposed to walk in front of them and...and point out the places to shoot.

Ed Metzler: Good gracious!

Mr. First: And...I...I pointed out the places and then ran like hell!

Ed Metzler: Holy mackerel!

Mr. First: And I never...during the time, I never got shot at.

Ed Metzler: Well, you must have felt like you kind of had a target strapped on your chest (chuckles)!

Mr. First: Oh boy, I did! I was scared!

Ed Metzler: Wow! So what are we...talking about Sherman tanks at this point?

Mr. First: Yes.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. First: Uh hum.

Ed Metzler: And...and were they equipped with flame throwers at this time?

Mr. First: Yeah, some of them were; some of them weren't, and a lot of the tanks were...shot up and...very badly and, of course, they were easy to see, and they...the Japs still had some anti-tank guns...and they lost a lot of tanks.

Ed Metzler: So you weren't necessarily safe if you were behind iron?

Mr. First: No.

Ed Metzler: So what is going through your mind as you're walking in front of that tank; are you thinking, "Hey, I may never see America again!"...or what...I know you're scared.

Mr. First: I guess, yeah, I guess that is...would be a good description of it.

Ed Metzler: Uhm. So are you...when you survived that, then what are you thinking, "Hey, maybe I'm...lucky person!"

Mr. First: Yeah, then the next morning I had to do the same thing again.

Ed Metzler: Oh. Well, you must have been good at it; they wanted you to do it again, huh?

Mr. First: Well, they didn't have anybody else to do it necessarily, and the...the armor and the...the various people in Headquarter's Platoon...weren't train...weren't trained really to do...the...assaults.

Ed Metzler: Hmm.

Mr. First: So they...they had us doing just...a little of this...that and the other...whatever the Captain had in mind.

Ed Metzler: What do you find was the most difficult part of the Japanese defense to overcome? Was it the mortars; was it the fact that they were just dug in? What...what made it so (unintelligible)?

Mr. First: The fact that they were dug in.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum. And so you had to go in a help get them out, huh?

Mr. First: Yes, uh hum.

Ed Metzler: Did you ever think about those moments after the war was over and you were back in the States and...living your life? Did it ever come back to you?

Mr. First: Well, actually very little. I...I don't go for this idea of being...all upset about...what...what happened in the past.

Ed Metzler: Well that's useful if you can do it; that makes life a lot easier. So did you see or hear about any combat fatigue when you were there; I guess that's the nice word for it, or did you observe this?

Mr. First: Yeah, there was some of that.

Ed Metzler: What's your feeling about that?

Mr. First: Oh, it was a very, very, true, true thing. I think the fellows that had combat fatigue were just...they'd had so much that their minds wouldn't accept any more.

Ed Metzler: Hmm, did you...

Mr. First: And it wasn't a matter of being cowardly at all.

Ed Metzler: Right. Did you ever feel close to that yourself?

Mr. First: Yeah, a time or two (chuckle).

Ed Metzler: Yeah, so how did you get through that?



Mr. First: Oh, just by doing what we had to do.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. First: I was...I was pulled out of the lines; I had hemorrhoids so badly...badly that I couldn't walk, and we couldn't do anything about it so they...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. First: ...pulled me out of the line and I...that was after about, oh, twenty days, I guess.

Ed Metzler: Did that just start while you were there or is it something that bothered (unintelligible)?

Mr. First: Yeah, it just started while I was there.

Ed Metzler: Isn't that amazing? And you just attribute that to the...just the physical travail that you're putting your body through when you're there, huh?

Mr. First: Yes, sitting on cold ground and...I guess, I don't know just what caused it.

Ed Metzler: Hmm. And you literally couldn't walk.

Mr. First: Well, I couldn't move fast enough to...be much good to anybody.

Ed Metzler: Yeah. So what'd they do? They took you back and...and what...did you go to the infirmary or what?

Mr. First: There wasn't any infirmary; we just...there was a few other people that were...bad for some sort of a thing...and...this, that and the other, and we just stayed back of the lines.

Ed Metzler: And as I remember, Iwo lasted for...goodness, weeks.

Mr. First: Yeah, thirty-six days.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, and so this must be what...about the...about half way through the Iwo Campaign?

Mr. First: Yeah, about a little more than half way through, I think.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, so you went back behind the lines and what did you do there?

Mr. First: Just sat around.

Ed Metzler: Hmm. At that point, are you getting information on...or getting feedback on how things are going up on the frontlines? Are you talking to people; what...are you just (unintelligible)?

Mr. First: Yeah, we were getting some ideas from...we'd see some of the people from our Company once in awhile.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum. So, I guess, as I remember, it took a long time to work their way...all the way up to the northern end of the island which is where...that was the last part that they finally took.

Mr. First: Yeah, that's true. Yeah, our Company was still fighting...to the last...last day.

Ed Metzler: So was it a...somebody actually declared victory or was it just kind of a general feeling that, "Well, there's no more resistance; I guess that's it," or how...how did it feel at the end of the Iwo Campaign?

Mr. First: Well, I think everybody was...convinced that there...there was very little in the way of resistance anymore, and I think they actually declared the island secure before the thirty-sixth day.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. First: And...yet...fighting was going on. And the Army took over; the Army came in and took over and they were supposed to clean up the...a few of them here and

there that...there was...there was still Japs underground and were still dangers...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. First: ...so they were supposed to clear that up.

Ed Metzler: So was the Army well trained for that mission or...what's your (unintelligible)?

Mr. First: I don't know.

Ed Metzler: That's right; you were pretty much back at the back at this point, weren't you?

Mr. First: Yeah, I don't think anybody...knew what the Army was capable of doing.

Ed Metzler: I guess they got it done though in the end.

Mr. First: Uh hum.

Ed Metzler: So when did you leave Iwo?

Mr. First: Probably about the thirty-seventh day I think.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum. So how did you get off the island?

Mr. First: Got in small boats; went out to larger ones.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum. So back onto what...an LST or a troop ship or what?

Mr. First: You know, I can't really remember.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. First: I think...I think we may have gotten onto troop ships.

Ed Metzler: Yeah. Were they able to treat hemorrhoids at all when...I don't remember...what they had, if anything back then; you just have to...wait until they...go down or what?

Mr. First: Yeah, that's what...what's happened with me; they didn't do any treatments at all, and they...they eventually got better.

Ed Metzler: Yeah. I guess time just kind of helps to solve that.

Mr. First: Yeah, I think so.

Ed Metzler: So when you were on the troop ship to leave, where did you go?

Mr. First: We went back to Hawaii...'cause we were training then for the Invasion of Japan.

Ed Metzler: Hmm. Yeah, that was going to be the big show, wasn't it?

Mr. First: Yes, uh huh. Yeah, that was the...the Sec...First and Second and Sixth Divisions were...attacking Okinawa, and they...they cleared that up and it was just as bad as Iwo.

Ed Metzler: Or worse even; took longer, I know that!

Mr. First: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: But it was a bigger island with a lot more population and...everything.

Mr. First: Yeah, and then...then all the Divisions...we were supposed to attack the southern island of Kyushu...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. First: ...and...I'm glad we didn't have to.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, that would not have been something to look forward to.

Mr. First: No, the...the Japs were going to...uh, have every man, woman and child with a weapon, and so I'm glad they dropped the bomb. Actually the bomb, the dropping of bomb saved Japanese lives, too, because they would...we would have had to kill everybody.

Ed Metzler: Yeah. So there never was a question in your mind, but that...that was the right thing to do?

Mr. First: No, it was...never a question at all. It saved...many American lives, and I think that...the bomb dropped...ther amount of people killed there would have been great...far greater if...if we'd have invaded.

Ed Metzler: So where were you when you heard about the bomb; were you in training in Hawaii for the...?

Mr. First: Yeah, we were training at Camp Tarawa up on the big is...top of the big island.

Ed Metzler: So when you heard that, was everybody pretty much figured, "Hey, that's it; we're not going to have to invade," or...?

Mr. First: Oh yeah, everybody...they...planted a sec...second bomb at Nagasaki; they stopped the war entirely.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum. Yeah, that was all in, you know, second, third week of August, and the actually signed the Surrender in early September in Tokyo Bay to make it official. Do you remember hearing about that final signature or was that pretty much...just...anti-climatic after the bomb?

Mr. First: I...I don't really remember.

Ed Metzler: So at that point you breathe a big sigh of relief, huh?

Mr. First: Oh yes! Yeah, I had orders to go to Pensacola at that time.

Ed Metzler: Uh huh.

Mr. First: And...I was going to be a Sergeant Pilot and fly...F4Us.

Ed Metzler: Let's see, the F4U, that's the Corsair, right?

Mr. First: Yes, uh huh.

Ed Metzler: Big old, gold...(unintelligible).

Mr. First: Yeah, they still had Sergeant Pilots in those days.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum, and so...did you?

Mr. First: (Pause).

Ed Metzler: Did...did you fly...fly or what?

Mr. First: No, I was just...just on orders to go to Pensacola when the war ended, so I never went.

Ed Metzler: Okay, so you didn't stay in; you...they of...they...they let you get out and you...didn't give it a second thought, huh?

Mr. First: No, I...I was a regular and I enlisted for four years, and my four years was up in...May of...1945...or '46...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. First: ...and our...our unit went over to Japan to occupy, and...we landed on Kyushu, and...

Ed Metzler: So you were part of the occupation forces?

Mr. First: Oh yes.

Ed Metzler: So you landed on Kyushu, but not the way you *thought* you were going to have to land on it?

Mr. First: Yeah, you bet!

Ed Metzler: (Laughter), I think you probably preferred doing this way, huh?

Mr. First: Oh yes! Yeah, we were there for eight...I was there for eight months, and...then I was sent back...just before my enlistment time was up I was sent

back to San Diego, and...was discharged May...I think May 22<sup>nd</sup> or May 21<sup>st</sup> of...1946.

Ed Metzler: Uhm, so what was it like in occupied Japan?

Mr. First: Oh, it was...really pretty good duty. I had...I was in charge of destroying Japanese radios and weapons and this, that and the other; had six Japanese working for me, and they were...good workers.

Ed Metzler: So how did...how did they get along with you; how did they treat you; how'd you treat them?

Mr. First: Oh, I think that they...they got along with the Marines well, and we got along with them well.

Ed Metzler: So they were very friendly to you then?

Mr. First: Yeah, you never knew whether they were just being...uh, obsequious...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. First: ...or...you...you couldn't tell with the Japanese...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. First: ...but they appeared to...be alright, and they didn't give us any trouble.

Ed Metzler: And what...where were you stationed on Kyushu?

Mr. First: I was in...let's see, Stoyoshi (sp?).

Ed Metzler: Is that a...a town there then?

Mr. First: Yeah, that was a town.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum, and so what kind of living accommodations did you have there?

Mr. First: Hmm?

Ed Metzler: They stick you in barracks or did you occupy, you know, civilian buildings or...?

Mr. First: You know, I *can't* remember!

Ed Metzler: Hmm.

Mr. First: I just can't remember.

Ed Metzler: Did you see a lot of...war damage; bombing damage and what have you when you were there?

Mr. First: Yeah, we did. Yeah, the...the B-29s had really screwed things up.

Ed Metzler: Uhm. Well, that was supposed to be what the Iwo Jima things was all about...was to give the crippled B-29s a place to land early when they were coming back from bombing Japan.

Mr. First: Yes, they figured that they saved more lives than we lost on Iwo Jima, so it was a...kind of a net gain.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, did you ever see any...allied aircraft land on...Iwo Jima when you were there?

Mr. First: Oh yes, sure!

Ed Metzler: So it wasn't...in fact, I...I guess I had heard that they landed crippled aircraft there...even before the island was fully secured.

Mr. First: Yeah, that's true, uh hum.

Ed Metzler: Well, at least there was *reason* for doing what you guys had to do.

Mr. First: Oh yes.

Ed Metzler: And did you get much liberty when you were in...uh, post-war Japan, so you could get around and see what things looked like or how'd that work?



Mr. First: Yeah, we went on liberty quite a bit.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, were you able to travel around Japan much or see anything?

Mr. First: Well, we got...got around Kyushu and...gee, I can't remember the name of the big town...

Ed Metzler: Yeah, I don't have a map of Japan in front of me. I can't remember where...there...that's...Osaka is down there or not; that's...Kobe and Osaka and...those big cities; I think they're still up on the main island.

Mr. First: Yeah, I don't know; I...just...just don't remember.

Ed Metzler: Yeah. Well, you know, it was a long time ago, Jack.

Mr. First: Yeah (laughter).

Ed Metzler: I think...I think you're allowed to not remember every detail...given how long ago it was.

Mr. First: Yeah, sometimes I can't remember my name!

Ed Metzler: (Laughter), well...so, you've put in your time there and then it was back to the States for...getting out of the military?

Mr. First: Yeah, I was...it...I was there within about two weeks of my enlistment...being up, and they had me pulling Sergeant of the Guard at...at San Diego for a little while.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. First: And then I got discharged.

Ed Metzler: So when you sailed back to the States, where did you...did you come into San Diego or San Francisco or where?

Mr. First: Came into San Diego.

Ed Metzler: So how did it feel to be...on American ground again?

Mr. First: Oh, very nice!

Ed Metzler: (Chuckles), and you were all in one piece, too!

Mr. First: Yeah. Yeah, I brought back fifteen hundred dollars with me, too. I played a lot of Black Jack on the way back.

Ed Metzler: Oh really?!

Mr. First: Yep.

Ed Metzler: Sound to me like you knew what you were doing.

Mr. First: Well, if you get...get a hold of the...

(end of tape 1, side B)

Ed Metzler: Okay, Jack First, tape 2, side one. So you came back with...how much money?!

Mr. First: About fifteen hundred.

Ed Metzler: That is a *huge* amount of money back then!

Mr. First: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: I mean...you could start...start a business with that!

Mr. First: I did.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter), I thought you might have (laughter)! Wow! All because of the Black Jack skills!

Mr. First: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: And have you maintained those skills all those years; the Black Jack skills, I mean?

Mr. First: No, I...I haven't played Black Jack since. We still play a little Poker.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, but no...fifteen hundred dollar pots, huh?

Mr. First: No.

Ed Metzler: (Chuckles), I mean, you're probably talking twenty-thirty thousand dollars in today's dollars.

Mr. First: Yeah, I suppose so.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, I mean, yeah...wow. Did you bring back any souvenirs from the war?

Mr. First: Yeah, I got a few here; I got a sword that I...uh, it's a...NCO's sword...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. First: ...and I shot the guy that had it.

Ed Metzler: Really? That make you feel kind of funny?

Mr. First: No.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. First: No, I never felt funny about any of this...

Ed Metzler: Really?

Mr. First: ...stuff.

Ed Metzler: I don't mean funny, ha-ha, I just mean funny...kind of strange.

Mr. First: No, never felt kind of strange.

Ed Metzler: So how do you feel about...

Mr. First: It was just something that had to be done.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, that's true, and it was clear who the enemy was, and it was clear why...why we were doing it.

Mr. First: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: How do you feel about the Japanese?

Mr. First: Oh, I'm glad they're our...our allies.

Ed Metzler: I take it from that that they are pretty tough fighters, huh?

Mr. First: They were *good* fighters.

Ed Metzler: Uhm.

Mr. First: Yeah, there was none of this...little short men with...big glasses; they were some pretty good-sized ones and very few of them wore glasses, and they were...they were *good* fighters.

Ed Metzler: Uhm, well they were definitely...dedicated.

Mr. First: Yeah, they were...really were.

Ed Metzler: So you don't...I'll use the term "hold it against them," so to speak as a...as a people because of some of the things they did?

Mr. First: No, no, they believed in...what they were doing because they...they thought the...the emperor was a god...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. First: ...and to die for him was just fine.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. First: And a lot of them did!

Ed Metzler: Boy, did they! Like all but two hundred of them at Iwo!

Mr. First: Yeah, they lost about twenty thousand men; we...we lost about, I think, fifty-six hundred killed and probably about...fifteen thousand wounded.

Ed Metzler: Uhm! When you were on Iwo, did you notice or see any kamikaze-type activity by the Japanese?

Mr. First: No, we didn't see that. The only thing that I remember as far as the air...air end of it goes, was that...uh, a...Japanese airplane came over for awhile and dropped a few bombs, but once the P-61 Northrop fighter's, night fighters, arrived we didn't see any more of those.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum! And so did you say...P-61?

Mr. First: Yeah, P-61.

Ed Metzler: Which one was that?

Mr. First: It was a twin-engine...

Ed Metzler: Was that the Black Widow?

Mr. First: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: Yeah!

Mr. First: I...I had worked on a bit of that...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. First: ...so I was real pleased.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, that was...that aircraft really didn't...it really became a factor towards the end of the war, didn't it?

Mr. First: Yeah, I guess so.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. First: It was a night fighter.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, hmm. Yeah, you may have been..one of those aircraft that you actually...helped put together up there!

Mr. First: Yeah, could have been.

Ed Metzler: Isn't that something?! So as you look back on...your experience in the Marines, how do you feel like it changed you as a person or did it?

Mr. First: Oh yes, it...it changed me (cough). If I'd not...not been in the Marine Corps, I would have been in the Army probably. But I'm proud of being a Marine.

Ed Metzler: Did you come back a little bit more grown up than when you went out?

Mr. First: Oh yes. I still had a lot to learn. Fact, I didn't get through college until I was...the year...about 19...1970. So I went back to school and...started the business here.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum. So how long have you been in business there?

Mr. First: Since 1954.

Ed Metzler: And you're obviously in the gun business.

Mr. First: Yes. Yeah, we manufacture...parts and distribute them.

Ed Metzler: I see.

Mr. First: Parts for obsolete guns that you can't...get anymore.

Ed Metzler: Oh, so that's your area of specialty!

Mr. First: Yeah, we've...quit being a regular gun shop; we...we started off as a regular gun shop and we got up to about a thousand guns on hand at all times, and we sold those all off, and we...I think we only have one or two guns out in front...area right now.

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. First: But we sure have a lot of machinery in the back.

Ed Metzler: I'll be darned.

Mr. First: And we have four machinists working.

Ed Metzler: Hmm. So, that was...that period in the Pacific, that was quite an experience for you, wasn't it?

Mr. First: Oh yes...for everybody.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, I guess so, and you...must be feeling lucky that you came through unscathed.

Mr. First: Yeah I...yep.

Ed Metzler: 'Cause heaven knows how many of them didn't.

Mr. First: Yeah, we lost...gee, I think we...there was only about fifteen or sixteen of us out of the whole Company that walked off unwounded.

Ed Metzler: Wow! And if you'd have been...continued up on the frontlines who knows what would have happened to you.

Mr. First: Yeah, I could have been dead very easily.

Ed Metzler: Hmm.

Mr. First: In fact, one time the Company Clerk and I were trying to get up to one of our wounded fellows, and a bullet hit his helmet and...penetrated and went around and went out without hurting him. And if that helmet hadn't been where it was, it would have hit mine straight on and...that would have been...that, so I got...got very lucky with the helmet.

Ed Metzler: My word! And he was...unscathed; it just kind of...

Mr. First: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: ...went in and ricocheted around inside...

Mr. First: Yeah, his...his head rang a bit I imagine.

Ed Metzler: ...and out the back.

Mr. First: But...it didn't...didn't hit him.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, you and I wouldn't be talking if...if he hadn't been there, huh?

Mr. First: Yeah, right.

Ed Metzler: Isn't that something?! Wow! Well have you ever gone to...any of the reunions and get togethers of, you know, your...Regiment or...

Mr. First: Oh yes! Our...

Ed Metzler: ...or Company?

Mr. First: ...our Company has been...probably more than any Company at all because of the fact we put the flags up.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. First: And...Captain Severance (sp?), he...he retired as a Colonel, and he was a Captain at the time, and he...is...kind of spearheaded these...things. We've had lots of...meetings. In fact, when I was living in California...this is where they usually happen, and Captain Severance sends out a...a couple of yearly newsletters to people in the Company.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum. And so have you been to a lot of those then over the years?

Mr. First: Yeah, I...I don't go to them anymore, but...

Ed Metzler: That's a long haul from where you live.

Mr. First: Yeah, we...there's one other fellow here in town that was in the Company and we have lunch together occasionally. And we travelled...we flew to California once for one of the things, but we...neither one of us flies around anymore.

Ed Metzler: Yeah. Well, that's a fascinating story. What other things can we discuss while I've...got you on type...tape, as...have we hit pretty much everything?



Mr. First: Oh, I think so. You...you've asked the...all...most of the right questions, I think.

Ed Metzler: Well, I know I've pestered you to death here with questions, and I appreciate you...fielding all of those. Yeah, it's not...not very often I get to talk to somebody who was part of the Surbachi scale, and so...I feel honored.

Mr. First: (Laughter).

Ed Metzler: I'm serious. And... this is probably a good time for me to...do what I don't think we do enough of and that is thank you for what you did for our country. And...it's because of guys like you that we're able to...do what we do today.

Mr. First: Yeah, that's true, I guess.

Ed Metzler: It is definitely. Okay, well, is there anything else you'd like to touch on, Jack, while...while I've got you here?

Mr. First: I...I just...as...think that doing this sort of thing is a real good deal, because first of all, I got my great-grandfather's...account of his ser...service in the Civil War.

Ed Metzler: Really?!

Mr. First: Yeah, he did that with...back in 1926 with...dictated it to his son.

Ed Metzler: Really?!

Mr. First: And...that's...that's why I wrote up...my experiences.

Ed Metzler: Wow!

Mr. First: Yeah, he...he went into to the...Pennsylvania, one of the Pennsylvania cavalry regiments and was...in the...he had a fair amount of little...engagements during the war.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, he may have been at Gettysburg.

Mr. First: Yeah, he...yeah, he was.

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. First: And...he went out...after...he was captured real late in the war and was in prison and he went back in the Army and came out here and...went through the Black Hills...where we are...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. First: ...and down to Denver which he said was...consisted of a couple of mud huts at that time.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter). My, how it's changed!

Mr. First: Yes (chuckles). At any rate, I was so delighted to see this...account of his experiences that I wrote mine down for my children.

Ed Metzler: Now that's great! That's great. And we got your story down in your own words for our Museum here as well.

Mr. First: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: Now...well, that's great. I..I tell you what I'd like to do; I'd like to go ahead and end the recording here, if that's okay with you?

Mr. First: Uh hum.

Ed Metzler: And so I shall do that, and thanks again for your time...so...

(end of interview)

**FINAL** copy  
CD – #OH02877 – Mr. Jack First  
Transcribed by: K. Matras  
Houston, TX  
July 25, 2018