

Joe Clapper Oral History Interview

FLOYD COX: It's August 28, year 2010. My name is Floyd Cox, and I'm a volunteer at the National Museum of the Pacific War. I'm here with Ms. Susan [O'Consky?], also a volunteer of the National Museum of the Pacific War, and we're at the Holiday Inn in San Antonio, Texas, interviewing members of the United States Marine Corps. I have the pleasure today to interview Mr. Joe Clapper concerning his experiences during World War II. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies archives and the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information related to this site. To start out, Joe, I'd like to say thank you for your service to our country.

JOE CLAPPER: You're welcome.

FC: All the young people of the United States should be able to shake your hand and tell you the same thing. I'd like to start the interview with asking you a few basic questions: where you were born, when you were born, about your siblings, what your parents did for a living, where you went to school, and we'll just take it from there.

JC: Okay. Well, I was born in a little town called Jonesboro, Indiana, and Jonesboro was a big metropolis: it had a

general store, a gas pump, and a Saint Bernard dog.

(laughter) That kind of summed up Jonesboro. It was outside of Marion, Indiana, mid-state, alongside the Mississinewa River. And I was the youngest of four -- well, five, actually, but one died at birth. And back then, everybody was born at home, and most of them was taken care of with midwives instead of doctors. And my father, well, he was a barber. He did several things. And then when I was quite young, when I was two, three years old, my family moved up to Michigan, to Kalamazoo, and my father went to work for a [stove company there?]. And I basically went to school, was raised in Kalamazoo, and finished high school there. And (audio distortion; inaudible) high school and (audio distortion; inaudible) Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. I was on a date with a girl. We came out of the theater at night and they were hawking extras on the street: Japs bomb Pearl Harbor. And my first thought was, where in the hell is Pearl Harbor? (laughs) So that's kind of where it started. I graduated from high school in June of 1942, and I enlisted in the Marine Corps in December.

FC: And why did you pick the Marine Corps, Joe?

JC: Well, that was interesting. I worked in a marina and was overhauling engines and refinishing boats and that, so my

first thought was PT boats. So I went to the Navy recruiter, and basically wouldn't give me the time of day. I just said, "To hell with you." I got up and walked out. When I was walking by, the Marine Corps was there, and I was ready to go in. I said, "Let's go." I walked in there and tried to sign up in the regulars, and they weren't accepting any more at that time. All you could do was join the Reserves. I said, "Hell, I'll join anything." So I signed up. They shipped me over to Detroit. Went through the physical, which was typical. You had to strip off, and everybody's running around [in their duff?] (laughter) from one station to the next. So you'd get poked, prodded, and all that good stuff, and at the end of it you'd get your clothes back on and were standing around there, and a major comes out, had us all line up. He said, "Now, if there's anyone here that wants to change their mind, this is the time. Just step out; nobody will say a word." And of course, nobody stepped out. We raised our hand and he swore us in and said, "Well," he said, "now I want to tell you it's too late. You're going to be some of the sorriest SOB's that ever walked the face of the earth." And he turned around and walked away. (laughs) And he was right. (laughs) He wasn't lying a bit. So anyway, from there, we got on a troop train. I was surprised; I figured we'd go

to PI -- Paris Island -- but they shipped us out to the West Coast. So we got on a cattle car and bumped our way through and got to LA and then on down to San Diego and got off and went through boot camp there in San Diego.

FC: Was boot camp pretty rough?

JC: Yeah, but it was rougher on some fellas than others, I guess. I think a lot of it depends on how you was raised. My dad was always pretty strict. He, as I said, was an old barber, and he had a razor strap, and that's -- he did, he used, but he didn't have to use it too often. (laughter) But he got his message across.

FC: So you're saying he used it for other than sharpening razors sometimes.

JC: Yes, he did. And he always checked your old rear end; if there wasn't any welts there, he'd go back at it again. (laughter) When the welts came up, well, he figured that was good enough. (laughter) That'd be called child abuse now, but back then that was just good old discipline.

FC: That's right.

JC: So being exposed to that, as I say, it didn't bother me that much in the Corps, because you didn't mouth off much to the old man. (laughs)

FC: That's for sure.

JC: So all in all, it was a damn good experience. Then we went up to, shipped us up to Elliot after we finished boot, and went through advanced training up there.

FC: Camp Elliot?

JC: Camp Elliot, yeah. I think that's Pendleton now --

FC: Mm-hmm.

JC: -- but it was Elliot at the time. And -- (audio distortion; inaudible)

FC: And what was your specialty when you went up there?

JC: Just an infantryman.

FC: Rifleman?

JC: Rifleman, that was it. And we got assigned, formed us up, and we got down in San Diego and got on board the ship and sailed out from there. But we [went lone wolf?]; it was just an old Liberty ship all by herself. We headed west for about two days, and then we headed southeast. We went southeast for, God, two weeks or more.

FC: You had no idea where you were headed?

JC: None, none, absolutely.

FC: Now, what outfit were you in? 1st Marine...?

JC: 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines. L Company, Love Company they called it then. It's Lima now. That's where I was assigned. But anyway, after we get southeast there, then we turn back west for a couple weeks or so and wound up in

Melbourne, Australia. And that's where I joined the 1st Division. We were replacements, because they had come off Guadalcanal. And was fortunate enough to -- didn't meet him as such, but saw old Lou Diamond. And (audio distortion; inaudible) (inaudible). (audio distortion; inaudible) -- Raiders on the ridge in Guadalcanal. He was still there, Vandegrift was still there, Puller was there. In fact, Puller was with us a long time. He was our regimental commander for most of the way through the Pacific. And --
(audio distortion; inaudible).

FC: Did you do some training there in Australia?

JC: We did, yeah. They would rotate a battalion at a time from Melbourne and send us out to a small town called [Danerda?], and it was out in the boonies. We'd do live fire exercises and that out there. We'd rotate a month at a time out to the boonies. We were stationed in the cricket grounds in Melbourne. The tracks ran, railroad tracks, ran right by the cricket ground, and it was like eight, ten parallel tracks coming into the main station downtown, and they'd just pull a train up outside of our cricket grounds and stop it, and we'd just climb over the fence and get on the damn train, and we'd go. (laughter)
And when we'd come back from Danerda, they'd just stop

there and we'd bail out and crawl under the fence and get back to the cricket ground. Yeah, it was kind of informal, but that's the way they operated. And, well, we'd get liberty when we were out in the boonies. We'd get a weekend pass and could catch the train, come back into Melbourne.

FC: Well, what'd you think of the Australian people?

JC: Great, really great. You couldn't ask for better people. They really were. (audio distortion; inaudible) a chance to go back over there in 2004 for the sixtieth anniversary of the landing (inaudible), and we went, made a stop in Melbourne. So we got to go to the old cricket grounds. Of course now -- cricket grounds at that time had a huge park around it with kind of footpaths through it, and now that's all gone and that's where their tennis complex is. They've built that in there. And the Australian Open, that's where that's held now. And the cricket grounds have been revised, remodeled probably four or five times, so it's completely different. But they did have some old pictures of the old cricket grounds the way it did look then. So I got to see those. I was fortunate in -- they were remodeling it again, so it was restricted; you couldn't get in the place. And I bumped into some fellow, he was gray-haired, an older fella, and I told him I was there in '43.

"Well, come on in." So [they took in?], and we got a special tour around. Come to find out, he was born in 1943. (laughter) That kind of makes you feel a little old. (laughter) But anyway, it was interesting.

FC: Now, about this time you guys are there, you're doing the various exercises, were you getting anxious to get into combat?

JC: No. We were more anxious talking to some of the old-timers [that had been on the canal?]. And yeah. They would tell you some of the stories, you know, the Battle of the (inaudible) [on the?] Tenaru River and some of those. And most of them, damn near all of them had malaria. They weren't in the best of shape physically. You'd come in and you'd find one of them in the bunk shaking like a dog. (audio distortion; inaudible) some blankets till he kind of simmered down. That's about all they did, give them quinine. Well, a little later they come out with Atabrine (inaudible), so. So most of the time we were pumping those guys for all the info we could get. That was helpful. Then we finally wound up going down to load up the ships because we were going to ship out, and the stevedores, or dock workers, were on strike or something, I don't know, so we had to go down and load the damn ship ourselves. We got down there and they had steam donkeys on the damn ships.

(audio distortion; inaudible) haul up the cargo and [that's that?]. Well, they stuck us on it. We didn't know diddly about it --

FC: Now, you said a steam donkey.

JC: -- but we had that damn rigging just dancing. It's a wonder we didn't break it all.

FC: Explain what a steam donkey is. I've never heard that term.

JC: Well, they're winches that pull the booms up, and instead of electric or gas-driven, they were steam engines. That was the power (inaudible). And they weren't the smoothest-operating thing in the world. (laughter) When they took a hold, they took a hold real quick. Like I said, we had those cables just a-dancing and a-snapping. It's a wonder we didn't kill each other. We finally got the damn thing loaded, anyway, and we got on board ship. We sailed north by the Barrier Reef. In fact, I think we were really inside the reef most of the time. And we went up north, and we wound up at a little island called Goodenough off the eastern tip of New Guinea. (audio distortion; inaudible) there, and then we set up camp and did some more training there. Wasn't too good a water supply there, so we built a sluice [wick?] up, lined it with banana leaves, and brought it down to behind our tents, set up a 55-gallon

drum there, and poured the water into that, and we had our shower all set up. That's the way we showered. I remember we had a first sergeant, [Bartholomew?] was his name, and he was one of the old-timers. He had like 17 years in the Corps at that time. And he was a redhead, and he had a big red handlebar mustache. I remember I was going to chow one day and I had my mess kit, walking by his tent, and Bart was standing out there with a mirror. He had scissors, trimming his mustache. I [just punched him?], of course, being a young kid, I said, "Bart, where you're going, it's not going to make a hell of a lot of difference." Bart turned around and he said, "Sonny," he says, "I'll live to piss on your grave." (laughs) And that was Bart.

FC: Did he make it all the way through?

JC: No, no. After Gloucester, they wanted to give him a commission, and they offered him a second louie, and he turned that down, a first louie, he turned that down; they offered him a captain [but?] all temporary. He said, nope, he said the only thing he'll take is a [warrant permanent?]. (inaudible) just stay where he's at. And my god, they finally came through with a warrant permanent. He was all smiles. He was headed up to officers' country. He said, "I'm going up there and play poker with them sons of bitches." (laughter) And Bart, when we went to Peleliu,

the first day I jumped a slit trench and Bart was laying in the bottom of it. He caught one right between the lookers. Still [in fact, better as?] I can remember jumping across there and seeing Bart, the first thing that jumped into my mind was, "Bart, you didn't make it. You didn't live to piss on my..." (laughs) But that's the way it was back then.

FC: Okay, so go back to Goodenough. Now, what happened after you're on Goodenough? You're getting ready to go.

JC: Yeah, we got back on board ship again and went up to a town called Finchhaven in New Guinea. And we landed there, and that was our staging area to land on Cape Gloucester. And it's jungle and rainforest, and we just went back in, and we had to whack out a hole big enough to put up your tent. We set up our bivouac there and (audio distortion; inaudible) didn't do too much training. It was more of just getting organized (inaudible) together. I remember the natives there. We'd take them and go out into the rainforest and pop us some -- I call them pigeons, but parrots or parakeets or whatever the hell the feathered things were -- to supplement our chow. (laughs) Because they'd make in a stew, and they all tasted good. Natives called anything that flew [*baloos?*]. *Baloos* number one, number two, number three. One was a delicacy; two is, you

know, medium; and three is okay. (laughter) So most of the pigeons we were knocking out were mostly twos and threes. And we got out there -- and the rainforest is very high. It's like 80, 90 feet up in the foliage, and it's almost all dusk in there. It's almost dark and very damp. We were in and the natives were all getting all excited and pointing up there, *baloos* number one. We're looking and looking, can't see a thing up there. Finally we see something move, wasn't sure (inaudible), [dumped up?], came down and unfolded. It looked like a B-29 coming down, damn wings out here. When it came down it was a bat, and the wingspan on that was damn near five feet.

FC: Wow.

JC: It was huge. Hell, it could have carried you away. It had a body on it about that big around. And of course, you know, a bat's face is just like a rat. They're horrible-looking, and the natives were just ecstatic; that was number one. We said, "Good, you can have it." (laughter) We wanted no part of that. They were happier than hell with that. But I never knew what it was. Years later I was watching *National Geographic* or one of those programs, and they had a segment on those, and they were called fruit bats. I'd never heard of them before, but I never knew they grew them that big. Man, that thing was huge.

Anyway, we got through that and got loaded up. We had our Christmas dinner -- that was the twenty-sixth of December. We had (audio distortion; inaudible) twenty-fourth. (audio distortion; inaudible) twenty-fifth. We had Christmas dinner there on Finchhaven, and then we landed on Camp Gloucester on the twenty-sixth, but the twenty-sixth there was the twenty-fifth back there, so it was Christmas Day back here when we landed.

FC: And when you went in to Cape Gloucester, was there any opposition when you hit the beach?

JC: No, no, there wasn't. We went in -- that was the only time we ever -- we went in in LCIs, and they had twin ramps on the front of the ship, and they just went and dropped them and bailed out. The only thing was Gloucester was like standing under a shower 24 hours a day. It just --

FC: Humidity was --

JC: Yeah, it rained all the time. And we went in and turned to the right and went down to take the airfield, and we --
(audio distortion; inaudible)

FC: [Were they?] ready for you when they got to the airfield? Japanese?

JC: Not much. Most of them were to the north. I think the 7th Marines had a bigger deal than we did. Actually,

Gloucester, as far as I was concerned, it was probably the lightest operation I was on.

FC: You took some casualties, however, didn't you?

JC: Yeah. And we went on a combat patrol. There was a volcano in the middle of the damned island there. I can't remember what the name of it was, but smoke coming out of it all the time. It was a company-sized combat patrol, and we went right up over the mountain, right around the lip of that. In fact, I crawled down in the damn thing, being a young kid and not knowing any better. The sulfur fumes were terrific. I remember that. I got the hell out of there. Then we went on over. There was what they called the overland [side-to-side?] trail was on the other side of the island. They had some aid stations and that over there. And we went over to get those, and I was a BAR man at the time. When we (audio distortion; inaudible) finished, [that was a?] (audio distortion; inaudible) some shooting going on. (audio distortion; inaudible) sure cleaned that out rather quickly, and (audio distortion; inaudible) the company was taking off, headed back. And I was elected to be rear guard. (laughs) That's a lonesome damn feeling. I didn't even have any ammo man with me, just my BAR, me, and what ammo I could carry. And I sat there while the rest of the company takes off, and you sat there waiting to see if

anybody's going to try to follow. It gets mighty lonesome out there. (laughs)

FC: I bet it does, yeah. I bet it does. They didn't even give you an ammo man with you?

JC: No, I just carried what I had on me. Sat there waiting, and fortunately, nobody showed up. (laughter) After a reasonable length of time, I thought, Well, to hell with this. I turned around and took off after the company.

FC: I don't blame you.

JC: I remember that.

FC: How old were you then? Do you remember?

JC: Let's see, that was '43?

FC: (audio distortion; inaudible) 18-year-old with a BAR all by yourself, and just enough ammo that you could carry. Wow. No wonder you took off.

JC: Nobody showed up, so that was the main thing.

FC: Well, after you kind of -- they settled Gloucester down, then where did you go?

JC: Okay. Then we boarded ship and went to [Bavubu?]. That was supposed to be our rest camp. Boy, what a hellhole that was -- coconuts rotting all over the place, rats all over the place, and land crabs. Every morning you'd get up and you'd shake out your boots because land crabs would crawl in there. You'd lay in your bunk at night and damn

rats would get inside and run around your damn bunk. You'd get up and throw those damn things out. (laughs) And then we finally got a campaign about killing rats, and they were giving a bottle of booze to the tent that turned in the most rats. (laughter) We finally got them pretty well thinned out. All except the land crabs. They never did get rid of them; they were all over the place.

FC: (audio distortion; inaudible) spooky at night hearing them move around, was it not?

JC: Oh, god, those rats were all over the place. And then there were always fights breaking out because everybody was stealing everybody else's rats to get (inaudible).
(laughter)

FC: That's a good story.

JC: Oh my god, (inaudible).

FC: To get that bottle of booze, huh?

JC: Oh, we made a still, too, and started brewing some of our own. Man, you could smell that all over the damned island.

FC: What did you put in your still to make --

JC: Everything. You name it, we'd throw it in there, (laughs) cook it up. Lots of sugar, get the [alki out?]. Got an old ammo tin, filled it full of water, and got copper tubing and coiled it through there for a condenser, and *drip, drip*. It was a drop at a time. It tasted horrible.

It'd get you drunk; I'll say that for it. Ooh. That was terrible stuff. The best thing we made there was raisin [jack?], out of raisins. Just get a five-gallon water can and throw raisins and yeast and sugar in it, and then we'd take wax paper and seal the damn can. We never even vented it -- which shows how smart we were. Closes up that can and set it there. It would set there, and when it started working, it'd go *bunk, bunk*. (laughter) And every once in a while one of them would blow its lid and you'd have raisins all over the ceiling. (laughter) But once it was done, oh, the raisins would swell up, they were that big around. And that was pretty good drinking. That was pretty good drinking. That was.

FC: It taste like bourbon or whisky?

JC: No, it was more like a wine. It was really good. That was the best stuff. And the coconut juice was all right, but I never [had get to that too much?]. Pop one and spike it, let it ferment right in the coconut. It would work, but I never particularly cared for that one. The raisins actually was always pretty good. We always had a can of that going.

FC: You did it in ammo cans? You made your --

JC: Well, a still, and we made the condenser in an ammo can. You just fill it full of water, and we just punched a hole

in either side and run copper tubing and coiled it and run it out the other side so when it come down and hit the water, it'd condense and drip out the end. (laughs)

FC: I guess that's called ingenuity, isn't it?

JC: Oh god, yes. And we had an old pressure pot we stole from -- I don't know (inaudible) [kitchen?].

FC: Midnight requisition?

JC: Oh, midnight requisition, yeah. One night, they were getting fresh beef in. So we got together, and we had two. We had one for decoy, and I don't know, they got some (audio distortion; inaudible) two or four, set off a couple explosions or something. Anyway, we got everybody's attention over that way, and we all raided in there and we [snuck?] the tenderloin out, hauled it back to the tent. (laughs) We sat those and slice those off and have steak sandwiches. Even the OD come around sniffing, so we had to cook him a steak sandwich, and he went on his way.

(laughter)

FC: Even the officer of the day wouldn't turn you in, then?

JC: Oh, hell no.

FC: After a free steak sandwich.

JC: That's right.

FC: So you're there, R&R, basically.

JC: Yeah, that's supposed to be our R&R.

FC: And then where (inaudible)?

JC: Well, we trained there, and then -- well, [Willis, Willy?] was our lieutenant. He got the Navy Cross on Peleliu.

FC: This gentleman right here that you're talking about.

JC: Yeah, that's Willy. He was (audio distortion; inaudible) said rest camp, Willy took it literally; that's for resting. All he did was get drunk every damn night. (laughs) And fact of the matter is when they had the regimental formation to pin the cross on Willy and pass out the other things, we come looking for Willy and couldn't find him. So we sent out the scouts, and we found Willy dead drunk. We get him, throw him in a shower, get him a cold shower and get him at least where he can stand with a little help and get him dressed. And then he [wanted?] a [salty fistcutter?], he called it, so we had to find one of those for him. And a couple of his buddies got on either side of him, and I think with their shoulders they held him up on the parade ground while they pinned the damn cross on him. (laughs)

FC: Was he first lieutenant?

JC: Second.

FC: He got the Navy Cross.

JC: Yeah.

FC: He was a pretty good guy to work for, so to speak?

JC: Oh god, yes. In combat, he was one crazy guy. In rest camp, man, he took that literally: he rested. (laughter) No, when you get in combat, oh, Willy's philosophy, "We're here and they're there. What the hell are we doing here? Let's go." And away he'd go. He was always volunteering [you?] too. (laughs)

FC: That's not always fun, is it?

JC: Oh, no. But that was Willy.

FC: So we finished rest camp, and we went where and did what?

JC: Okay. And we finished, well, at rest camp, then we went back down to the canal. Made a dummy landing down there.

FC: On Guadalcanal?

JC: At Guadalcanal. Willy again. So we landed, and then we just bivouacked for the night. Fact of the matter, when we landed there, we went charging in through the brush, damn near run down Vandegrift and -- oh, the (audio distortion; inaudible) [other?] guy. Nobody ever really liked (audio distortion; inaudible) for Vandegrift. (audio distortion; inaudible) fella?

FC: I can't --

JC: Anyway. They were standing there watching the operation behind some bushes, and we come charging through there and damn near run over them. (laughter) But anyway, we bivouacked on the island for the night. Willy comes along,

he says -- we had khaki, everybody. We had Army khaki, we had Navy khaki. Whatever. We had a little bit of everybody. But the Army khaki had flaps on the pockets like the officers had. And he says, "You got any of that Army khaki?" I said, "Yeah." He says, "Well, put some on." He says, "I'll pick you up about 1900." Okay, all right. (audio distortion; inaudible) on and Willy comes bouncing in there in the Jeep. I don't know where he got it; he probably stole the damn thing. I got in, and we go bouncing down the road, and he says, "Here, put these on," and hands me a pair of bars.

FC: Uh-oh.

JC: (laughs) So I pin them on, and he said, "When we get up there," he said, "don't say 'sir' to no son of a bitch." (laughs) And we go up to the 11th Marine, to their bar up there. Well, we got roaring drunk and come back, and he drops me off. But that was Willy.

FC: And what was your rank at this time?

JC: At that time I was a PFC.

FC: Yeah?

JC: Yeah. (laughs)

FC: You could have been in a lot of trouble had you -- impersonating an officer?

JC: What they gonna do to you? You're over there anyway.

(laughter)

FC: Yeah, that's right.

JC: Well, that was Willy. He was crazy. You get (audio distortion; inaudible) but, you know, he'd ask you to -- we'd get new guys in, replacements, and he'd come by and he'd say, "You know what the hell (inaudible)?" He said, "Make sure they know it," and he'd take off. (laughs)

FC: Well, before I forget to ask you, did he survive the war?

JC: He survived the war, but he died. He was from Greenwich Village, New York, and --

FC: Sounds like you were quite close to him.

JC: Oh, oh, Willy was one great guy. He was. He had -- well, I know -- well, Chesty Puller was our regimental commander, and I know -- I don't know (inaudible) captain, but somebody from battalion was bitching to Chesty about Willy, what a pain in the butt he was at rest camp, or whatever it was. Chesty said, "Yeah, I know, he's a pain in the ass, but," he said, "he's one of the best officers I've got in combat."

FC: So I guess they could put up with him.

JC: They could put up with him. That was basically Chesty, yeah: it's your problem. But anyway. We got through there, and we landed on Peleliu.

FC: Tell me about Peleliu.

JC: Well, we went in in LSTs, and -- oh, on the way up there, we had the Navajo code talkers. I saw one on deck. He had a chessboard, and I sat down and we played a game of chess. I was talking to him about the Navajo language. Always interested in swearing in different languages, and he said, "You can't swear in Navajo; there's no swear words." So in our conversation I had, asked him how he said "ass" in Navajo, and I got that, and then later on I asked him how you said "hole," so I can always say [*ichi nichii?*] (inaudible). (laughter)

FC: Did you learn that Navajo (inaudible)?

JC: He said that don't count. He said you don't swear unless you take the Lord's name in vain, and he says you can't do that in Navajo. So I guess he had a point there. (laughter) But anyway, we landed. We went in in the LSTs and went down. Well, we get up at like 1:00 in the morning is reveille, and you'd get steak and eggs and a good meal, and then you'd go down and get in the amtracs and down in a hole. They finally opened up the jaws, and the ramp goes down, fire them up, you go out. When you first drop in that water you think you're going to sink, but those things only got about six inches or a foot of freeboard on them. We went down and then we just move around in a big circle

until you get a wigwag, and then everybody forms up and you start in.

FC: Can you describe how you as an 18-, 19-year-old felt at that time, when you know you were going into harm's way?

JC: Well, I was really -- you know, honestly, going in was exciting, and it was one hell of a show. In fact, I was sitting up on the [sight?] of the amtrac there, jumped up and sat in there to watch the show, because all the planes were dive-bombing the shore, and of course all the wagons and everything were just firing. I don't know if it was West Virginia, one of the wagons I know was off our left, because were just breaking off the fantail headed in. And there may be 10, 20 yards past the fantail, and they let go with a -- I don't know whether it was a broadside, but it went with the 16s anyway, let go. All it is is a big ball of fire and smoke. And talk about concussion! (makes slurping noise) It sucked that amtrac damn near out of the water. I thought it was going to sink. We're turning around shaking our fist at them. (laughter) We got by that and went in and then had one up on the reef. There was a barrier reef you had to crawl over. And we got over that, and we just sat in there watching the show and going in, and then, *swoom*, we can hear them, the shells going over, and then we started hearing *swoom*, *plook*. They were

starting [to?] coming in instead of going out. (laughter)
And we thought well, maybe we -- and about that time there
were some small arms starting to rattle off the tank, so we
decided the better part of valor was to get the hell out of
the gunwales and get down inside, and we did. But up until
that point it was just a big show. That's when you started
to pucker it up, and you started rattling [off the...?].
And when we hit the beach, we hit on White Beach, and K
Company was on our left, and the point was there. And they
had machine guns raking down the beach. I already said,
you know, crossing the beach was like running between
raindrops. You had machine-gun fire coming down there.
And boy, you just get the hell off the beach.

FC: You took quite a few casualties there, did they not?

JC: I would say we lost over half our platoon that first day.

FC: Wow.

JC: And we had a little kid -- I say a little kid; Junior. J.
M. [Morsey?], from Harlan County, Kentucky. He was 15
years old. We tried to get him surveyed before we went,
but it was too late; he had to go. (audio distortion;
inaudible) was with us. And we were going up a ridge there
the first day, and there's Junior hollering, "Look out,
Joe, a Jap." I looked down and there was one looking at me
right over the -- I was looking down the barrel of the damn

thing. Junior was carrying a bar, and he flipped that up (inaudible) my ear and [burped?] him. Ooh, I could have kissed him. (laughter) Man, I thought I bought the farm there for sure.

FC: Did you have any hand-to-hand combat at that point? You got that close?

JC: Well, throwing grenades back and forth. That's called hand-to-hand, but hand-to-hand's when you get your hands on a body; that's what I call hand-to-hand.

FC: Yeah, with bayonets.

JC: No, I never (inaudible). Throwing grenades back and forth, yeah, I lobbed them all the time. And then one of my best friends, [Rosie?], and I were going down by a bridge. It was probably 30 feet high, something like that. And a guy peeled up and hit Rosie, and hit him on the side and come out his back and blew his lung out, because it was hanging out.

FC: What was his full name, do you remember?

JC: [Fortune Orlando Rosencran?] III. (laughs)

FC: You remember.

JC: I remembered Rosie, yeah. Rosie was a -- he went in the Corps back in like '39. So yeah, as far as I was concerned, Rosie was one of the old breed. Rosie was a good boy. But that's the way it went. [Just like Bert?].

[He had 17 years?], made no difference. We lost a lot of them. In fact, we wound up, lost close to 70 percent. And we got back -- hell, we were on our way to Okinawa when they announced on board ship (audio distortion; inaudible) wounded (inaudible) [follow?] midship on the starboard side. They were lying up there back to the stern. Hell, everybody got hit. You know, went through there and they were passing out Purple Hearts. (laughter)

FC: Just get in line, huh?

JC: Yeah, yeah, just like a chow line. They would hand you your Purple Heart, and you went down the latter and they had a mail setup, and (laughs) you mailed the damn thing home. (laughs) That's how I got that one.

FC: You got --

JC: They still owe me two more.

FC: Where were you wounded, Joe?

JC: On Peleliu, I got shot the second day. I got shot right through here.

FC: Wow. Pretty close to the heart, wasn't it?

JC: Yeah. Missed all the vitals, and that's all that's necessary. And I got evacuated to a hospital ship and up to the Admiralty Islands.

FC: So you were wounded in your chest on the left side.

JC: Mm-hmm, yeah.

FC: And you went to the hospital ship, and --?

JC: Yeah. Yeah, we were following a tank. We got some tanks, and then that was the second day when I got shot. We were going up [a road?] towards Bloody Nose Ridge. Looked up the ridge on my left -- Rosie got killed the first day, so that was over. I looked up the ridge. I got [seen?], bastards running around up there. So I just dropped down the (inaudible) and started whacking away. One of the guys said, "Hell, you're drawing their fire." I said, "Well, hell, that's what the hell they're here for, so shoot them sons of bitches." (laughs) And anyway, I got up, and that's my famous words, [you should have stood up?]. I stood up instead of shut up, and when I stood up, that's when he nailed me. (laughs) Anyway, I got down to the base hospital, and then shipped back up to (inaudible) the rest of the guys showed up, (inaudible) left anyway. And we sat there and wait for our replacements to come in, and started training again for the next operation, which happened to be Okinawa. In the interim I was promoted up to sergeant.

FC: You started your training, and then when you went to Okinawa, were you on the first wave, second wave, second day, or?

JC: At Okinawa, we were reserve going in there. But that landing was unopposed. We landed and went up to, well,

Yontan Airfield at that time. And we set up a perimeter defense around Yontan, (inaudible). You could look out over the bay, because Yontan was set up on kind of a plateau. Every night they'd come over, drop a few bombs, and all the ships would open up with their [AA?], and it was just like the Fourth of July, sitting there watching a show. And then they moved us out, moved us north, and then we went up north, and then we took our platoon and split us up into three squads across that damned island, across the isthmus. And we had to set up on our knoll at night and set up a perimeter fence and then just patrol during the day and clean out caves, and trying to collect all the civilians. [They?] had some -- because *detekuru*, I can remember that, that's "come out," and [*hada ha kininede?*] is "strip." (laughs) That's the only two things I remember.

FC: That's what you'd say to Japanese? "Come out and strip"?

JC: Yeah. Well, we had some others, you know, "We'll give you food and water," but I can't remember what the hell those were now. And we'd clean them out. Usually -- well, they were scared. They were reluctant to come out. Usually you'd get a little kid would come out, or a real old person, and you'd jabber with them a while and get them to go back in the cave and finally coax everybody out. And

then we had one come out, there was a gal come out, and she had a little baby, and still had the umbilical cord was still attached. It was an old gal. You know, I figured she was too damned old to be having a baby, so, you know, looking around, we found some more caves. This old gal had an eyedropper and was squeezing water out of a mud puddle and feeding it to the baby. We knocked that out and give them some water out of the canteen. And then we cleaned out some other caves, and a gal come out that was -- got all excited and ran -- that was old enough, must have been the mother of the baby, and gathered the kid up. Then all the guys said they were going noplac until the kid gets fed. (laughs) So I'm over there telling this gal to -- you know, point to the baby, (inaudible) [going this way?], feeding the baby. Finally she flips out a boob and --

FC: Finally understood.

JC: -- kicks it in there. And everybody [sits down?], because the rest of the guys said, "Hell, we're not going to go no place until that kid gets fed." (laughs)

FC: That shows you Americans.

JC: Oh yeah. Well, there it is. Had mutiny on my hands.
(laughter)

FC: Was it tough cleaning out these caves with Japanese soldiers in them?

JC: With the soldiers, yeah. And a lot of them [if?] they didn't clean out, you just [send them up?].

FC: Were you wounded here on Okinawa also?

JC: Yeah, I got -- let's see, early -- well, when we got through up north, then we were shipped back down south and relieved an Army unit that was pretty well whacked out. Then from that point on, it was just one ridge at a time. I got thrown off of one ridge. It was either an artillery shell or a mortar or something, but it (audio distortion; inaudible). It literally blew me off the damn ridge. Fortunately, it was about a 60-degree slope on the back side, and it was like shale, like a foot deep. (inaudible) slid a third of the way down, turn around, climbed back up the damn thing. And [Shakey?] got to me, and I got a piece of shrapnel in my back. (audio distortion; inaudible) base hospital, so I was back there for a few days, and they patched it up, and I come back up.

FC: So the corpsman took care of you right after you got hurt.

JC: Yeah. Then about a couple weeks after [I went back up that time?], (inaudible) machine gun, and just got clipped in the leg. Nicked was all. So I went back to the base hospital again, just a day or two, and then went back [out?]. That was early June. There was about a week left, I think, to go, and they decided to ship me back to the

States. Jumped on board ship, there was a mixed complement, and there were sailors from some of the [cans?] that had been kamikazeed. It was a mixed complement. And we (inaudible) back to Guam, [Tinian?], (inaudible). We stopped at all the podunks (audio distortion; inaudible) and (inaudible) back into Frisco. Got sent to Paris Island as a drill instructor. (laughs)

FC: Well I'll bet you were tough.

JC: Uh-huh.

FC: Knowing you had to get these guys in shape for what they were possibly facing.

JC: Yeah. And then I met my wife there. She was a nurse at the base hospital on Paris Island. She was on the maternity ward. Met and married and 10 days, and everybody said, "It won't last," and it didn't -- only 57 years. (laughter) But no, it was a... I got discharged on October twenty-second, and we got married on the twenty-fifth. She was from the Deep South. She called her mother, explaining to her mother who she was getting married, and I always kidded my mother-in-law, the first words that I said I ever heard out of her mouth was, "Why, [Jenny Lou?], he's a damn Yankee!" (laughter) Just called her up on the phone, and she said, "It's just that damn Yankee again." (laughter)

FC: Well, tell me about when you were over in the islands. How was mail? Did you get a lot of mail, or what was your opinion about mail, getting mail?

JC: Well, I guess I'm an odd bird, because I never wrote too much. In fact, my mother always gave me hell, because she said the only damn time she ever heard from me was the three times I got wounded. (laughter) I had to make sure I got a letter off to her not to worry too much if she got a telegram. (laughter) Fact of the matter, she sent me a postcard one time, and it is, "I'm doing fine," and it's checkmark and says, "Eating well," checkmark. [There's nothing?], she said, "All you have to do is check it off. You don't have to write." (laughter) Because I didn't. I wasn't too good at writing. No, guys got mail. Of course, they'd get a package with a rum-soaked cake or something, everybody was around, getting a handful of that.

FC: I'd like to ask you two questions. Can you describe the best time in your life when you were in the Marine, when you were active Marine, and the worst time of your life?

JC: The best time is really my time in the Corps. The Corps is an institution all itself.

FC: It's family, isn't it?

JC: It is a family. And that's one thing you can always depend on, is the guy next to you. It didn't matter. You knew if

you got hit, that somebody's going to come and get you. By the same token, if somebody else got hit, you were going to go get -- there was no ifs, ands, or buts. That's a cold fact. Another thing in the Corps, personal gear was an absolute taboo; you did not touch anybody's personal gear. Brush. If there was \$10,000 laying there, if it belonged to a guy, you didn't touch it, because if you did, man, that was -- once was all it took. (audio distortion; inaudible) steal a tank or an airplane or a truck, you get all kinds of help to go do that.

FC: Bottle of booze.

JC: Oh yeah.

FC: Belonged to somebody else.

JC: Anybody -- there, you'd get all kinds of help for that, but boy, you don't touch anybody's personal -- you could leave cold cash laying on your bunk anytime, and nobody would ever touch it. That's something you just never forget.

FC: Okay, now tell me about the worst time in your life as you remember it, while you were in active Marine.

JC: (audio distortion; inaudible) [Everybody's get it?].
That's the worst time.

FC: You don't forget it, do you?

JC: No, you don't. You know, you can just pull up images, and they're just as vivid today as they were then. I'm a firm

believer everybody ought to put in a couple years in the damn service. You see some of these young kids. I [would?] shake them. (laughs)

FC: That's exactly right. Well let me ask you this: do you ever have dreams about what happened 60 years ago?

JC: Not anymore. At first, occasionally I did, but no. It happens.

FC: Time won't always erase memories, but it kind of dilutes them.

JC: Yeah. You can still pull back memories. I can still see Rosie. I can still see the lung hanging out of his back side.

FC: (audio distortion; inaudible) pretty picture.

JC: Yeah.

FC: Well, let me ask Susan. Susan, do you have any questions you'd like to ask Joe regarding his time in the Marines?

[SUSAN O'CONSKY?]: What did you think about the medical treatment when you were injured? Were they good medics?

JC: Great. Those corpsmen were something else, I mean, they really are. In fact, we tried -- [Shinky?] was our corpsman, and he was from Minnesota.

FC: What was his full name?

JC: God, I can't tell you. Shinky was... We tried to get him a Navy Cross or Silver Star or something, and the damn

battalion sergeant general said that was his job, and that really ticked us off, because Shinky -- I saw Shinky bent over a guy and had shot both the damn canteens right off his rear end. Shinky never even blinked an eye; he kept right on working. Now, (audio distortion; inaudible) deserve a lot of credit.

FC: (audio distortion; inaudible). Before we conclude this, was there anything you'd like to add, Joe, that I haven't asked you?

JC: I'll probably think of something later, but that's the way it goes.

FC: Well, once you get the transcript, please, add anything, any memory that you'd like to have. And I certainly appreciate this time that you've spent with us.

JC: You're very welcome. I hope that it helps somebody somewhere sometime.

FC: It certainly will. Thank you again.

END OF AUDIO FILE