

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview with

**Garvin O. Suggs
George West, Texas
January 12, 2012**

**C Company 1st Battalion
21st Marines
3rd Marine Division
Iwo Jima**

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is January 11, 2012. I am interviewing Mr. Garvin O. G.O.” Suggs by telephone. His phone number is 361-358-5715. His address is: 601 FM 1596, George West, Texas 78022. This interview is in support of the National Museum of Pacific War, Nimitz Education and Research Center, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II

Mr. Misenhimer

G. O., I want to thank you for taking the time to do this interview today and I want to thank you for your service to our country during World War II.

Mr. Suggs

I wasn't sure which war you were interested in, World War II, Korea, or Vietnam?

Mr. Misenhimer

You were in Korea and Vietnam too; I would like to hear about both of those also.

Mr. Suggs

In World War II I was a rifleman. I was with the 3rd Marine Division. Did you see the DVD that I sent to Alaniz that was in the Marine Corps League?

Mr. Misenhimer

No sir I haven't see that.

Mr. Suggs

I was with the 21st Marines, 1st Battalion. Charlie Company. In Guam I caught the mopping up operation at Guam. We were in the jungle in the northern section for about four months. Then we rejoined the unit at the center of the island in January of 1945. Then we went to Iwo Jima and I landed with Charlie Company there at Iwo Jima. It was the 21st of February. I don't know, after about six or seven _____ I think it was around the first _____, somewhere in there. We had Able Company. I was told that Able Company was wiped out except for two men; a Lieutenant and a Sergeant. Those are the only two that I saw. I was transferred to Able Company then and they made me a squad leader. They gave me 13 men. At that time, a rifle squad was 12 men but they gave me 13 and even put me over a Corporal. They said that

I had more combat experience than any of them. It certainly didn't feel like it but anyhow, we wound up going all the way through to _____ Point. With Able Company, when they pulled us off the line there were only 22 men left in the Able Company. They had all landed after we did. There were only two men that had made it all the way through the campaign. That was another man and me. I spent 22 years total active duty in the Marine Corps which was split time in there. I was discharged after World War II and then went back in and was in three years. I was discharged. I was out 17 months, and then went back in for Korea.

In Korea, they put me into Intelligence and Operations. I worked in that position for six months or so. In fact I ran into my old commanding officer. My officer in charge there happened to be my commanding officer on Iwo Jima. That was ironic. After Korea I stayed in and then retired and then Vietnam came along. I was out for four years or so and I went back in then for Vietnam. Before I had retired out the first time, I had gotten trained in administration. So when I went back in for Vietnam, I was the administrative chief of a headquarters outfit. I was there for only about four months in Vietnam. I didn't do any fighting in either Korea or Vietnam. I've got pictures of the _____ blowing up an ammo dump from my office door. We got rockets and everything every once in a while. As far as combat goes that was all in World War II. I don't know, I kind of believe that I might be able to get the combat ribbon; I don't know if I could get it for Korea or Vietnam or not. But I have never applied for any of that stuff. I don't know what I could get ribbons for. I know there are several ribbons that have been authorized that I haven't applied for. I don't know if I ever will. That is sort of a general run down. But as far as World War II and Iwo Jima that was really something at Iwo Jima. There wasn't anything that I did that got me through. I always figured that it was our Heavenly Father that got me through or got anybody through. I didn't do anything above or beyond or anything that would make me heroic or anything like that. I think I did just what everybody else did. We were all just doing our job.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now you landed on Iwo Jima on the third day, is that right?

Mr. Suggs

Yes. We landed about two hours before dark on Iwo Jima on the 21st of February.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you landed, was there much opposition

Mr. Suggs

No. They had the beach party there. They were landing supplies and stuff like that. There were an awful lot of bullets flying in the air. We had halted there one time and my group leader, Corporal _____, happened to be squatting down and there was a string of bullets that hit the sand beside him. They just missed him by about a foot. Those bullets, they cracked all night for several weeks; all day long and night those bullets were cracking. The artillery was set up. We bedded down on the beach that night and at that time I didn't know the difference in that artillery fire. I didn't know if it was incoming or outgoing. The next morning we had to get up way before daylight and then in single file we started marching up to the front line then. We had to go several hundred yards and the closer we got to the front lines the more artillery and everything that would come in and air bursts. We had to cross one leg of the airstrip to go up. The Japanese were laying down a lot of artillery, mortar fire and air bursts on that airstrip. The _____ company. I have a long story about that, crossing that runway. This _____ company they gave the nickname of Dud because we had to dodge a lot of duds. Those duds, when they hit the runway, they would tumble like a football. They would tumble and then they would roll and sometimes they would tumble again. If they rolled our way we would have to watch them as we worked our way up the side of that runway. Anyway, they gave me the nickname of Dud. That is what that DVD shows of Garvin O. "Dud" Suggs. That is on the DVD but they cut that incident in half and there is a lot more on that runway than they showed. The Charlie Company was in reserve at that time. Baker Company went on the frontline. They relieved two companies from the 4th Division. We were in the reserve for one day and then we went on the frontline. They put us up against the elite Japanese force on Iwo Jima. We had I think around seven or eight hundred pill boxes that had to be knocked out. In fact, Herschel Williams got the

Medal of Honor that day. At Guam we were in the same company. He was transferred to Battalion Headquarters. He knocked out several pill boxes with a flame thrower that day. I was told to go give him rifle support. They pointed in the direction he was at; ahead about 100 yards. So I went over there and there was nobody there. I couldn't find him. But anyhow I hunkered down in a hole because the artillery was raining in. We were under artillery, mortar and air bursts for about four hours. That really wiped out most of my company. We only gained about 50 yards that day. I don't know, but the next day we gained about a hundred yards. Then we set in and the next day after that was the day that I got caught in front of the line and was pinned down by Japanese machine guns. They called in artillery support on that position where I was at. But then I had no way of escaping except for running a good hundred yards while that machine gun was shooting at me. I told that on the original interview but I don't know if that is on that DVD or not.

I made that dash and this is where I think the good Lord didn't want me to die yet. I finally made it to where I could get cover, back to the line. The stories just go on and on. Every day there were so many incidents and I guess I was hit I don't know how many times with shrapnel. Every day we were under artillery and mortar fire and the cracking bullets; they were just continuous all the time. There was only one piece of shrapnel that brought any blood at all. At that particular time I would have had to wade through a bunch of those cracking bullets to even find a corpsman. I called it a Band-Aid wound. I didn't want to risk my life for a Purple Heart. I figured I was going to get hit anyhow; either killed or mangled or maybe get two or three Purple Hearts before I ever got of the island if I was even able to live. It goes on but I made it all the way through.

I don't know Richard; that's just hitting the high points. Well not the high points but I don't know what all you need to know.

Mr. Misenhimer

Just go ahead and tell me about everything that happened on Iwo Jima.

Mr. Suggs

That would take several hours.

Mr. Misenhimer

Go ahead, I've got plenty of tape. What was that black sand like on Iwo Jima when you landed?

Mr. Suggs

That black sand was just on the beach. If you went in a little ways; as we were walking down that airstrip; we ran out of that black sand. There was a lot of sand there but it was gray sand. That was all in the center of the island. There was a lot of rugged terrain in the northern section. We took the high points in the center of the island. The 5th Division got an awful lot of advertisement but I sat here and figured out one day the numbers percentage-wise concerning casualties. The 3rd Marine Division actually had more casualties than the 4th or 5th Division because we were in the center of the island between the two divisions. We were also catching fire from both of those divisions. We would gain more ground during the day that the 5th or the 4th Division. That would put us into a point and the point was curved. So we were not only catching fire from both sides but from the Japanese also. Percentage-wise the 3rd Division had more casualties. One of the reasons is that we had less men to be hit because they were at full strength. We had only two regiments and the 4th and 5th Divisions had all of their units. They had three complete regiments plus all their other supporting units and everything. We took the high point. We gained this one day, I think it was the 28th of February, we went several hundred yards; about 300 yards I guess and took this hill, the high point. But I was on the left flank and the 5th Division was right there and we tied in with the 5th Division's right flank. I remember watching them throwing hand grenades. I was looking down on them but all the books show that the 5th Division took that hill; which is wrong. We were pushed off of that hill one time. In fact, there were about four of us that got pinned down by machine guns on that hill.

We took the hill and spent the night there. The next morning they pulled us off and we went back about 100 to 200 yards or so and cut left to go east. We went several hundred yards there. We were in double-file going down this road and when we reached a certain point on this road, that buzz-bomb that they had, which was a rocket, our unit called it a buzz-bomb but I think other units called it different things; that buzz-bomb went right over my platoon's head and headed for the platoon behind us and wiped out nearly every one of the men there. It wiped out I don't know how many.

There weren't very many men left in our company at that point in time. My platoon was leading the company at the time and it just missed us and hit the platoon that was marching behind us. It killed or wounded most of them. I think there only about 3 or 4 that were left in that platoon. We went on another 200 to 300 yards and then they put us in the back of the line again. This was in an area where later on they had a lot of problems taking that area. It was rugged terrain. We started digging in for the night and the Japanese were hollering at us and everything. This is where I got hit. A buzz-bomb came in again and this is where I got hit with that piece of shrapnel that brought a little blood. They had a Banzai charge right on our right, maybe 50 yards or something like that. Then, I guess it was about 9:00 or 10:00 they made us move. They were dropping those flares and every time a flare went off we would have to freeze. It was right there by that third airstrip. Boy that was really hard to take; to stand there and be real still. If we moved, the Japanese could see us. We moved further on then, further west. Then the next morning we went around the third airstrip and then went east. We attacked that day and that evening they pulled us off the frontlines and sent us to the rear for a rest. Boy, I'll tell you, we were really tired because we were only able to get about maybe three or four hours sleep. If we got five hours we were pretty lucky. I was so exhausted. We went to the rear and I had a friend that he and I met in Houston, Texas at the recruiting office. From there they sent us to San Antonio and we took physicals and were sworn in. Then we were in boot camp together and all the way through, the rifle range. We went to combat infantry training and we were in the same platoon overseas. But then at Iwo Jima when we went in to rest, I was in one fox hole. It was kind of deep. I guess it was about three feet deep or so and he jumped into that hole. He wanted to ask me if I had a comb. He wanted to comb his hair. It just so happened that I had a comb and he combed his hair and we talked for two or three minutes or so. Then he jumped out of the hole and a few seconds later I heard a rifle fire. Somebody said, "There's a sniper in the area." It turned out that this sniper had shot him in the stomach and killed him. I even went down later to make sure that it was him that was killed. They had rows of bodies that were covered with ponchos and everything; all neatly laid out. The guy that was overseeing all those bodies said that I could go and look under all the ponchos to see if I could find him. So I went ahead and aborted on that. I didn't do that.

I went five days without anything to eat because I was too scared. I was scared the whole time that I was awake. I guess I was just like everybody else. Everybody was scared. After we had one day of rest and I was able to eat, then we went back to the line again. This is when we took that high terrain in the center of the island somewhere on the 28th of February and then working around. It sounds like I am getting my days mixed up. I don't have any notes in front of me. We were pulled off. Around the 1st or 2nd of March we were pulled back and this is when they sent in replacements then. This is when I was made a squad leader. On the 28th of February, we were four months passed by 18th birthday, and then on the 6th of March, I had one year in the Marine Corps. I was a squad leader then and we went on. We had a squad to go all the way to reach the beach. They got a canteen of water and sent it back. But nearly all of those guys were killed coming back. I think that we had a squad that was pinned down by the Japanese. The Japanese captured these guys and I think it was this squad that reached the beach but I had to take my squad and go out in front of the lines and fire into the caves to try and rescue these guys. That was a bad situation. They were all killed except for two men.

I told this story on the original tape. It would probably be a good idea for me to send a copy of the unedited tape. I will send that along too. When they edited that tape, evidently they cut the tape to make the DVD that they showed on TV and then they tried to put it back together again. The second part of this tape is, I think a little mixed up. There is a lot of footage that is missing.

We got caught in a beach mine. The Japanese had set up beach mines at various places there one night. They set those beach blinds off one night and that wiped out a lot of our guys. I just happened to be in the foxhole that was covered by limbs; about four or five inches in diameter. In those tree trunks there was a big chunk of cement with a big iron bar going through it that hit right over the top of that foxhole we were in. If that thing had come in on us, it would have crushed us.

We were in reserve there behind the 5th Division for two or three days. We were getting under mortar attack all the time. The Air Force brought in some P-51s. One day while the mortars were raining in, those P-51s came in along the beach and they looked like they were 20 – 30 feet off the beach. They were probably 50 feet or so and they dropped those napalm bombs and then they

scooted right up the side of that hill, Hill 365. As soon as they dropped those first napalm bombs the mortars ceased fire. We stood there and watched those P-51s. They made two or three runs on that hill. We went on around and wound up to _____ Point, all the way to _____ Point. There are a lot of stories in that day. We captured five Japanese. I killed a bunch of them. It wound up that everybody was supposed to pull back. Everybody did pull back except our platoon. We were several hundred yards out there into the enemy territory. We wound up having to give a password to get back through the lines that night.

I think it was the next day when they pulled us off the line permanently. We were out of it. They sent us to the rear. We were in the rear then for three or four days. In fact I got my first shower. I hadn't had a shower; the last shower I had was a salt shower aboard ship. That water on my body, it made my whole body tingle. Then there were about 200 Japanese that came out of their holes and attacked the Air Force at the airstrip. They were south of us towards Suribachi. I was leery because I felt like that we could get killed before we got off the island. We finally made it off the island and it took me a long time before I could realize that I was actually going to live; even after we got back to Guam.

On Iwo I had accepted death. In fact it got where I guess I became a barbaric brutal killer. I became where I was fighting against. The mortars didn't seem to affect me anymore. One day I remember we were under a mortar barrage and there was a rock I was sitting on. It was about three feet high, coming out of the ground, a round rock. I was sitting on it when that mortar barrage came in. I just sat there and mortars were exploding around me. I felt like, well, it doesn't make any difference if I get killed now or later on. Everybody else ran and jumped in holes. I guess I don't know how long I sat there. Maybe a minute or so, a couple of minutes; and then I just walked over and crawled into one of the holes some of the guys were in. I told them, "If we ran about 40 or 50 yards we would be out from under this mortar barrage. As soon as we get aboveground we are going to be full of shrapnel." Which they all knew. But they all agreed to make the run. These guys were in my squad. At that time I think I only had about eight men left. I told them to follow me. I sprang up out of the hole and took off and we got about 50 yards and we were out from under the barrage. All

of my men joined me except for one. I didn't know if he changed his mind or what but his name was Tidwell. A few minutes later, here came a stretcher bearer and he was on that stretcher. His eyes had big old stars in them. He just looked at you and it looked like he was looking right through you. Somebody gave him a cigarette and we talked for about a minute and somebody said, "I guess he's going back to the States." It's ironic, many years later I happened to be stationed at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point and there was a fellow that checked into the office. He was a young fellow. I think he was 17 or 18 years old. His name was Tidwell. I asked him if his dad was on Iwo Jima. He said "Yes." I said, "Was he wounded?" He said, "Yes." I said, "What unit was he in?" He didn't know what unit it was. I wish I had went ahead and got his dad's address and everything and wrote him to see if he was the same guy. I'm pretty sure it was. I think this guy's dad was the one that was with me on Iwo Jima.

Relating these stories, I am bouncing back and forth in time. It's all messed up and I'm pretty sure that it is confusing. There is a fellow here that lives in Odem. He has a lot of movie equipment and everything and they have been wanting to take me and sit down and be organized on this thing and to film me relating these incidents.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you see the flag raised on Iwo Jima?

Mr. Suggs

No, I didn't even know that they had raised a flag until a couple of days after it had been raised. When I heard about it, we were on the second airstrip and it was early in the morning. Our unit was about to go into the attack and they had us spread out and we were going to have to cross that airstrip. I was scared to death. I said, "As soon as we start crossing that airstrip the Japanese are going to throw everything they have at us." In fact, I think that they have a picture of me. The airstrip was on high ground. It was about 15 feet high I guess. It slanted down and it was sand. It was real sandy. There was a shell hole there and I hunkered down in that shell hole. The bullets were cracking and there were explosions every once in a while. I hunkered down in that in a fetal position and there was a war correspondent that had come by and he filmed me, or at least he think I did because I have

seen this on TV; a person hunkered down in this shell hole and he was shaking. I was scared and I was shaking. It looked like the clothes I was wearing, everything. A few minutes later, my group leader came to me and told me to go to a certain area and that there was a war correspondent there. He said, "Get your picture on film." That was another case where I didn't want to risk those cotton-picking bullets and get out of that hole. Those bullets were still cracking. My group leader told me that they had raised the flag on Mt. Suribachi. The first thing I thought of was, "We won't be getting any fire from the rear because they finally have that high ground. So we won't be getting any fire from there rear but we still have a long ways to go yet." That was my thought. I don't know just what date that was, but that was the day that the 9th Marines relieved us. My group leader told me stay right where I was at and that the 9th Marines were going to relieve us. They came through our line and as soon as they went on top of that runway it was just like I thought it was going to be. The Japanese started throwing everything on that runway. Then the guys, the wounded started coming back on the stretcher bearers and guys were limping; heads bandaged and arms and everything. If they could walk, they were coming back. There were a whole lot of people wounded that day. I remember this one stretcher bearer bringing this one guy. The stretcher is concave and it sunk in the middle, you know. His shoulders were holding all the blood, keeping it from running down. The blood was sloshing around his shoulders, head and neck. He had part of his head that was completely cut off and his brains were sloshing around in his head. Boy I'll tell you, I don't know. I guess I was real lucky all the way through. It seems like, I don't know, I just missed a whole lot of stuff I guess but there was a lot that I was in.

Just like right now, talking about the wounded. The day that the platoon and I ran 50 yards to get out from underneath that mortar barrage, we were in reserve then. When we went back to our area, I saw a corpsman; he was bandaging up a guy from one of the other holes. I walked over to see what was going on and come to find out, I think there were three guys in another hole and one of the mortars had landed inside that foxhole. I believe it killed two of them but one of them was wounded. One of the first things that I noticed; I came in from, like from the top of his head. His head was closer to me than his feet; the first thing I noticed was that his right foot was lying on the ground and

my first thought was, "That's odd." It looked kind of strange but as I got closer I saw what had happened. There was a piece of shrapnel that had cut his leg right through the bone and everything, about two or three inches above his ankle. It completely severed his ankle and his foot from his leg. The only thing that was holding his ankle and foot on his leg was a piece of flesh or a piece of skin that was about a half-inch to three-quarters inch wide. As I walked up to him, the guy was conscious. I guess he saw my feet or something and he raised his head backwards to look at me and I could see his eyeballs kind of rollback to look at me. He tried to say something and smiled at the same time. He tried to grin and say something but then he gave up and his head went back to the normal position then and man, I'll tell you, I don't know but I can see that guy's face right now just as plain as if it just happened. I just turned around and walked away. I guess I don't know whether that was a good thing pulling that squad out from underneath that barrage or not. I lost one man and that was Tidwell but if we had stayed under that barrage, I might have lost more men. I don't know.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is there anything else that you remember from Iwo Jima?

Mr. Suggs

The first day that we were on the line and those artillery shells were raining in, and Herschel Williams was knocking out those pill boxes with a flamethrower, he already had several riflemen with him. I read later on that, or I was told later on, that the riflemen that were guarding Herschel Williams when he was knocking out those pill boxes, the Japanese attacked them. There was one Japanese that had a sword. He came out with that sword to hit the Marine. The Marine raised his hand up and that sword hit his hand and sliced his arm right on down to the elbow. I think most of those riflemen were killed. I think there were only about four riflemen and I think one or two of them got killed. The rest were wounded. One or two were wounded. I'm not quite sure how many there were. I thought, "Well, I wonder how I would have fared if I had went up that hill? I would have been one of those rifleman that would have been fighting those Japanese in hand-to-hand combat."

All those banzai charges, it seems like they were always either on the left of me or on the right. One night the Japanese did hit my platoon but then it turned out that my squad was in platoon

reserve. I didn't know just what to do. I thought about joining the fight but I believe that would have been wrong. I went ahead and told my guys, "If they break through, we are going to have to stop them." I figured that there was no way that we would be able to stop them. I had only about four men trying to guard the whole platoon rear because I had loaned out a couple of guys. So I figured, it was just a quick thought, that this was probably where I was going to get killed. But our platoon was able to stop them. The next morning then my two my men were sent back to me. They needed more men on the frontline so they borrowed some men from me. They were sent back to me and one of them said that he didn't even have time to load his rifle. He just grabbed his rifle and used it like a club; swinging it like a baseball bat to hit those Japanese. That was a bad night right there. First of all, before this Banzai charge, whenever we set up my platoon leader told me that I had rear guard. He told me, "If you see anything in the rear, shoot to kill because there are no friendly forces there." But then about 9:00 or 10:00 that night, mortars started up. The mortars then started falling on our left flank. We were facing the rear towards Mt. Suribachi. Those mortars were falling to the east of us I would estimate 40 yards or so; 40 to 50 yards. So I alerted the squad. I woke everybody up and told them to get ready to fire. I had this gut feeling. I said, "I've got soldiers back there." Those mortars were so close you could see the sparks flying out of the barrels. Then they were falling on our lines. This gut feeling that I had was so strong. I said, "I've got to find out if they are friendly or foe. In order to do that I have to send a man to Platoon CP." But then I had another problem. We had been told that nobody was to get out of their hole that night. If you see anybody running or crawling or walking, "Shoot to kill because they will be Japanese." If I sent a man to Platoon CP he would probably get killed. I said, "I need to send somebody to run fast." A man is hard to hit with a rifle when he is running. He doesn't even have to be running. If he is a good distance runner, you can hardly hit him. Of course, somebody running fast, that certainly isn't much leverage. We were taking every little piece of leverage that we can get hold of. The smallest amount we would take advantage of. To me, somebody running fast, that was a little bit more leverage. I thought about each one of the guys. "Who would be able to run fast?" When I was in school I played football. I played in the backfield and I was always running with the ball and I was usually faster than anybody else on the

team. I figured that I could run faster than they could. So I decided that I would go. I went ahead and put the assistant squad leader in charge in told him that if he heard any firing or anything then to go ahead and open up on those mortars. So I took off running. I was running in the direction that I wasn't sure that I would be hitting the CP holes of the platoon, but it was a dark night and you could hardly see anything. As I was running of course I was thinking, "Nobody is firing yet. Am I going to be able to make that next step?" I was finally getting close to the Platoon CP but I had a man in my squad whose name was Tremble. He shook all the time. In face we called him Shaky Tremble. It's ironic that his name would be tremble and he would shake all the time. I don't know if that was a physical condition or if he was just scared. I think he was scared because if he shook like that the Marine Corps wouldn't have accepted him; there would be something wrong in there. He was scared just like the rest of us were. I had loaned him out to the Platoon CP. He was being used by the platoon leader as a runner. So he would be in the Platoon CP. When I thought I was getting close to the hole I starting hollering, "Hey, Tremble, don't shoot, this is Suggs. Don't shoot this is Suggs." Then the hole popped in view and sure enough here old Tremble was. He was on one knee and had that rifle pointed right at my stomach. I went ahead and jumped into the hole and told the platoon leader what the situation was. He grabbed his field phone and cranked it and talked to somebody, I guess at company _____, and told him what the situation was. Then he went ahead and roger'd out and told me, "Don't fire. Those are Charlie Company mortars. They moved in there after dark and there is a banzai charge going on there. The line curves south. Those mortars are falling in front of the line. They are not killing the Marines." That was certainly a good thing that I had that gut feeling. The good Lord put that feeling in me. I had to make that run back to get to my hole. I went ahead and made it okay. I've often thought about that situation. If we had opened up on those mortars, then those mortars would have been fired back at us. So there would have been a firefight of Marines killing Marines. That was a good thing that I went to that CP. In combat you have to make instant decisions, regardless of whether they are right or wrong. You have to rely on the training that you have in order to make right decisions. There are a lot of mistakes that have been made. For instance, they never did tell us what was going on. Then they would come down

and tell us that they had a meeting and they were going to do this or they were going to do that. We just didn't get any information. In the morning they would tell us we're going on the attack today at 8:00. We will be getting air support or the artillery will be firing ahead of us or something like that and that was about all the information they would give us. I don't know if that created casualties or not. It could have created casualties that night on those mortars.

Mr. Misenhimer

G.O. when did you leave Iwo Jima?

Mr. Suggs

I don't know. It was in the latter part of March. I remember that it was in April when we were aboard ship going back to Guam. While we were aboard ship there was another island that was attacked. I think it was Okinawa.

Mr. Misenhimer

April 1st was the attack on Okinawa.

Mr. Suggs

Yes. It took five days for the ship to get back to Guam. It was roughly in the first week of April that we were aboard ship.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do on Guam?

Mr. Suggs

I had three primary duties. I was a rifleman primary, the assistant BAR man, Browning automatic rifle man, and I was Company First Scout. In Guam they ran us through a course and I was told that I had the best reaction on all the problems we had to contend with; cross the dry ditch when a machine gun opened up on us. They had a dummy that came out of a tree and fell on us and different problems like that which we had to contend with. They claimed that I had the highest score of all the ones that went through there so they made me Company First Scout. They used me one time in Guam. There are several stories concerning that too. I wasn't used as a First Scout at Iwo Jima but I think the reason they made me First Scout, and I probably shouldn't even say this, the Marine Corps

would frown on it. I was the youngest man in the battalion at one time there. I was 17 years old. In fact they were going to use me to participate in the Marine Corps birthday. That was in 1944. I don't know, they didn't use me, but here I was a Private at that time and they figured that; a First Scout in the first place, when they use a scout he has to go out in front of all the other troops. If he walks into an ambush, he has a very small chance of living through that ambush. He has to be awfully lucky or react real fast or something, there has to be cover around. I guess they figured that if anybody was going to get killed that I was the least valuable one in the outfit and it probably should be me. So they made me Company First Scout. That was not only my thought, but that is what I was told later on of how they usually picked their scouts. I don't whether there is any truth to that or not but I thought I would mention that anyhow.

Mr. Misenhimer

When they invaded Guam, you were in that invasion, right?

Mr. Suggs

I wasn't in the invasion. I landed on Guam September 21, 1944. On the 22nd of September I was assigned to Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 21st Marines. That was up in the northern sector. We had a tent camp there that was in a coconut grove. They had snipers. I don't know offhand but what I am thinking about right now is when we were standing there waiting to be assigned to platoons one of the guys came up to me and said, "See that guy standing over there?" There was a guy standing there with his shirt off and had sores on his back from jungle rot. He said, "He knocks the teeth out of these Japanese when he kills them." I thought, "How cruel that is, gosh dog." But it turned out that every day when we went out on patrol we were killing Japanese and it got to where anything like that wasn't cruel at all. Usually when we ran across any Japanese that had fled to the jungle, they would usually run. Whoever was able to take a shot would open up. It would be nearly the whole squad. We would go out on squad or platoon patrols. They would all open up at the same time on the Japanese so we wouldn't know whose bullet actually killed a guy. There was one there where we were on a platoon patrol and I had already seen a Japanese when we first entered the grove. When we entered a grove we would spread out in a skirmish line and then comb that area that we went through. I had

seen this Japanese and had told my group leader but he didn't believe me. When we got so far, about middle-ways down into this coconut grove we went to the right and were about to go into the jungle and I think somebody heard something on our left. So my group of four men were sent out to investigate the noise. It happened to be that Japanese that I had seen. He started running and I was in the position, where he had been sitting on a log. He jumped up and starting running. I threw my rifle up to my shoulder and aimed right between his shoulder blades and pulled the trigger. That was the first person that I know that I actually killed. There were about four things that happened to me at the same time. When I pulled that trigger and the rifle butt kicked my shoulder there was a nauseating feeling that spread from the top of my head to the bottom of my feet. It seemed like I had stepped through an invisible wall; a wall that there was no turning back. You go forward but you couldn't turn back. Here I had taken this man's life. I had stepped into an evil world. It was a terrible feeling but the killing kept going on. At Iwo Jima I just became a brutal killer. I wanted to kill them so that it would take a long time for them to die. I wanted them to suffer. There is a big story behind all of that too. I wouldn't want to go into it right now. All that might be on that second tape. I've only played it once and I don't remember what all is on any of those tapes. They were about three hours. It was in February of last year. That was the Iwo Jima's Survivors Reunion. I wanted to talk; they told me that Herschel Williams, the Medal of Honor winner was going to be there and I wanted to talk to him. Also I thought there would be other guys there from the 3rd Division that I wanted to talk to. There were only 11 Marines up there. The rest were all sailors. I think there were about 30 or 40 sailors that were there. This production company; the way I understood it was that the Navy had hired them to come there and document the *USS Indianapolis* and they had seen Herschel Williams and me talking. The camera lights were flashing and everything. Then they came over to me and asked me if I wanted to be interviewed. I thought were they going to just ask two or three questions and that would be it. They led me to this one room that was empty and they had a couple of cameras set up; a camera and a couple of lights. They told me that they wanted me to relate my combat experiences. So that's what happened.

Mr. Misenhimer

I need to go back and ask you some questions. What is your birth date?

Mr. Suggs

October 28, 1926.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Mr. Suggs

I was born in Gregory, Texas. It was about a mile out, on the La Quinta Ranch.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Suggs

I had two brothers and three sisters.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were any of your brothers in World War II?

Mr. Suggs

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Suggs

Aransas Pass.

Mr. Misenhimer

What year did you graduate?

Mr. Suggs

I didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer

What date did you go into the Marines?

Mr. Suggs

I went into the Marines on March 6, 1944.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you take your boot camp?

Mr. Suggs

San Diego.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was your boot camp?

Mr. Suggs

I had a couple of problems in boot camp. I weighed only about 130 to 140 pounds or something like that. When reveille went in the morning we had three minutes to be standing in rank at attention. It seemed like I was always the last one to get in rank. There would be several of us hitting that door at that same time. I even fixed my pants so when I rolled out of that top rack, I would roll right into my pants and get going. Then after that we would run around the parade field and then we would clean up before breakfast. I was a slow eater. I couldn't eat fast. It has always been that way. When a guy got through eating he would have to go outside and stand in rank until the rest of the guys in his platoon joined him. Everybody would be standing there waiting and I would usually be the last one there. It finally got to where in the later part of boot camp that the drill instructor would ask instead taking roll call, "Is Suggs here?" If they answered yes he would do away with the squad leader's reports. So we would take points off then. Then too, I hadn't started shaving yet. I just had peach fuzz on the top of my lip. That DI he got me there one day and had me dry shave right in front of him in his tent. While I was dry shaving, he was laying there in the rack and another DI came in and started talking to him, I was thinking, "If I bear down on this razor, he will let me go sooner." That was wrong thinking. They discussed things for several minutes while I kept dry shaving and my face was as red as I don't what. Those were the kinds of problems that I had in boot camp. I have a boot camp picture. They gave us so many shots. I think they gave us five injections. I had the flu when they took that picture. I had fever and I was about to fall off of that

_____, I look terrible. I didn't go to sick bay. I just toughed it out.

Bit the bullet so to speak.

Mr. Misenhimer

What dated were you discharged after World War II?

Mr. Suggs

That was on May 6, 1946.

Mr. Misenhimer

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

Mr. Suggs

I was out 17 days and then I went back in. When I got to Ingleside, we lived in Ingleside then, I got to running with two recruiting Sergeants in Corpus. One of the main reasons I went back in was because I figured we were going to go to war against Russia in, I estimated, about four years. I said, "I don't think I can take another Iwo Jima. I need to go back into the service and get training in something so I won't have to fight anymore." So I went ahead and between those recruiting Sergeants and my boss, I went back into the service and at that time we got \$50 a year for re-enlisting. That was the only thing they guaranteed you. So I re-enlisted for three years. They did send me to MCAS El Toro, California. I put in my time there but then I got out.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get home with any souvenirs from World War II?

Mr. Suggs

I had money and I had a Japanese flag and a Japanese rifle. I had a first aid pouch full of Japanese teeth but all of that; the teeth were promised to my uncle. He said before I went overseas; I asked him, "What do you want me to send you from overseas?" He said, "Send me a pair of beads made out of Japanese teeth." I was able to get about 12 or 13 teeth and I put them in a first aid pouch but when I was at Guam they wouldn't let me send them back. You could hardly send back anything. I got them smuggled back and sent them to him. Most of that stuff was lost. There was one; I had a billfold that had blood on it and there was a Japanese that I had, I guess you could say I murdered

him, I don't know, this is a story. I wound up on _____ patrol and _____ came up and he had his billfold in his right pocket and I stabbed him on the right side. It had blood stains on it. I lost all of that too. Right now, I don't have anything from World War II. My flag was stolen at Guam. The rifle I sent to my dad. That was eventually stolen from him.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Suggs

Yes. At Guam we were getting a package it seems like every four or five days. They would send us in supplies when we were in the jungles on Guam. It would have candy and cigarettes and some reading material; a bible, those testaments, and different things like that; toothbrushes, toothpaste. We would get stuff like that. I said they were sending us candy but we didn't get any candy. They called them D-Bars; the chocolate D-Bars. When I first got to Guam those D-Bars were bitter. Pretty soon they got to where they were real sweet because the Medical Department said that a body needs a certain amount of sugar. But that's what we had were those chocolate D-Bars.

In Korea we got the Red Cross boxes. Supply is the ones that would handle those boxes and we would send up men to get those boxes. I sent a Sergeant one day to get our Red Cross package and while he was gone I heard a shot so I ran to Supply then to find out what had happened. Here he was lying on the ground. A bullet went right through his head; right in the forehead and out the back. He was laying there with blood pouring on the ground. What had happened is that somebody had turned in a .45 that was loaded. The procedure was to check the weapon when you turned it over to somebody and the person that receives the weapon is to check it again. They didn't do that and there was a guy that was checking the .45 out and he didn't use the proper procedure either. So it wound up killing the Sergeant. He was from Texas. I have a picture of him. In Vietnam we didn't get any Red Cross packages in Vietnam. Our unit didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever see any USO shows anywhere?

Mr. Suggs

Yes. It was enjoyable to see those USO shows but it was also depressing. They always had those good-looking women, beautiful women, sexy-looking women in those shows. In Guam we saw one but we had them in Korea. I have movie films of the ones in Korea. In Vietnam I don't recall seeing any.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was the morale in your outfit during World War II?

Mr. Suggs

I don't know. Each war was different. In World War II everybody was more patriotic and willing to do just about anything in order to get the job done. I think the morale was better; it seemed to be more cohesive amongst the Marines in World War II than it was during Korea. Vietnam was a bad situation. It was really stressful there. In Korea they had Johnson, I think it was Johnson that said, "Get all the riffraff off the street and put them in the service." We had more court martials in Korea than in World War II. In Vietnam that was the drug revolution there. That was a bad situation there. We had the smokers and the ones on drugs. I guess they tried to organize and wipe out the staff NCOs in the unit that I was in and they would throw hand grenades on our boardwalk and in our hutches. The regiment set up floodlights on our areas and they had two staff NCOs then to patrol the area during the hours of darkness. They only had four hour watches during the hours of darkness. That was a pitiful situation there. They even threw hand grenades in the enlisted club where they had a floor show going on. That killed a couple and wounded a whole bunch of them. They started searching every man's locker, confiscating all kinds of gear. I have pictures of what they laid out. Boy it was amazing what these guys collected. They even had one of these bow and arrow deals that shoot like a rifle. They had rockets and hand grenades, all different kinds of weapons. It was a chaotic situation. They got some of these smokers there one night; there were about five or six of them I think and they had them in battalion legal. I went to see if any of the guys were in our unit. If they were in our unit that would be paperwork on me. I had just left; none of them were in my unit; I had just left the battalion legal and I guess I was about 30 yards away when one of the smokers that

they hadn't got threw a hand grenade right up by the door and shrapnel went through the door and wounded the guys that were interrogating the ones they had gotten. I thought it was an incoming rocket and I ran to the bunker and I made the mistake of not bending lower than what I did. I hit that top beam with my head and boy, my feet went right out from under me and landed in the bottom of that bunker, right on my back. I saw stars and everything lighted up on the inside of that bunker. So the morale was really bad in our battalion, our regiment in Vietnam. We were in Da Nang on Red Beach.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose on the radio?

Mr. Suggs

No, we didn't have a radio at Guam or during World War II. I think I heard her later on TV. I think they played her voice on TV one time but I never heard her on Guam or during World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer

What ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. Suggs

I never got any personal ribbons. We got the Presidential Unit Citation, the Navy Unit Citation, and the normal ribbons, Asiatic Pacific with two battle stars. I was also in China so I got the Chinese ribbon and I got ribbons for Korea, the Korean PUC and the Unit Citation. In Vietnam, I was there for over four months. I think I got the one star for Vietnam but I believe that I rated two. I need to check the book on that, check the dates as to what I was eligible for Vietnam. They set those ribbons for battles by dates. I think I went into the so called Second Offense by one or two days. But no commendations or anything like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Have you had any reunions of your World War II outfit?

Mr. Suggs

They had a Third Marine Division Reunion in San Antonio about ten or twelve years ago and I went to that. Our battalion had what they call a mini-reunion. I ended up sitting at a table with the battalion commander at Guam and Iwo Jima. That's another story. He wanted me to sit at the table with them.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is there anything else that you recall from your time in World War II?

Mr. Suggs

In Guam the mosquitoes were bad. The jungles were insect infested and the mosquitoes would drive you crazy. I got Dengue Fever when I was there and I guess that was about the sickest I ever was in my life. This was an unusual situation. This is another incident where I think the good Lord had his hand on me. I came down with fever and went to sick bay and they put me on no-duty and had me to go and lay in my rack. While I was lying in my rack this one day, I started gasping for breath. I couldn't get enough air into my lungs. I started moaning and it just so happened that a corpsman happened to be walking by the tent. Everybody else was gone out of the area except the First Sergeant. It is ironic that a corpsman would be walking by my tent at the time that I am gasping for breath. He heard me moaning and he ran in and he started massaging my stomach and got my breath back to where I was breathing normally again. He said that he was going to the battalion to get an ambulance to take me to the hospital. A few minutes later and the ambulance was a jeep with cots on it. He took me to the hospital then. The hospital was a horizontal tent. It wasn't a pyramid. The tent I guess was about 40 feet long; you know how long they are. The situation was, the doctors and corpsman walk up and down the center aisle and there are bunks on each side and they have bunks with mosquito nets on them. Those cotton-picking mosquitoes would always end up on the inside of those nets regardless of how you tucked the sides in. They had a sort of little ditch-like deal in the center of the aisle that every time it would rain water would rush through the tent. It would be like a little river running through that tent. It would depend how much it would rain but the cots would be sitting in water. That was one miserable week and a half that I was in that hospital.

We had barbed wire that was strung up around our area. They would patrol one day and one day it would be working parties and one day might be lectures or training and one day of guard duty. Usually before we would go on post we would get together with one of the guys that had a post on one side of the other. We would take and sit back to back. One would look down one way and the other would look the other way, on this post. This one night I failed to get with one of the guys where we could sit back to back. It wound up that here I was, stuck out there in that cotton-picking jungle, on that post all by myself. The post on the right went right and the post on the left went left and I guess there were several hundred yards in there but I was out there by myself. It was scary. I walked my post. I got into one area where I heard something that sounded like a person walking. At first I thought a Japanese had gone through the barbed wire somehow. I stood up back-to-back against a coconut tree and then I crawled under a bush. I could hear this “clomp, clomp, clomp.” It came right up on me and I was ready to fight but it happened to be a big old frog. I’m telling you, that was about the biggest frog I’ve ever seen. It was about six to eight inches long and several inches wide. It would hop and hit those leaves and it sounded just like a man walking. Finally I was relieved and I was a nervous wreck. The last thing we had been told was that the Japanese a lot of times would get through the wire and they would take the wire and wrap it around your throat and cut your throat. That is what we were afraid of, one of the things.

Mr. Misenhimer

That is all the questions that I have. Thanks again for your time today G.O.

Mr. Suggs

We appreciate your calling.

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