

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

The Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview With

Herman R. Shirley

Victoria, Texas

August 22, 2012

B Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion

1<sup>st</sup> Marines, 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division

Gudalcanal, Cape Gloucester, Peleliu

My name is Richard Misenhimer: Today is August 22, 2012. I am interviewing Mr. Herman R. Shirley. His phone number is 361-582-4495. His address is 305 Stirrup, Victoria, TX 77905.

This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War, the Nimitz Education and Research Center for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Herman, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today.

Mr. Shirley:

OK, well, thank you.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And I want to thank you for your service to our country during World War II.

Mr. Shirley:

Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, the first thing I need to do is read to you this agreement with the museum to make sure it's OK with you. So let me read this to you. (agreement read) Is that OK with you?

Mr. Shirley:

Yeah, that's fine, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What is your birth date?

Mr. Shirley:

December 2, 1919.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where were you born?

Mr. Shirley:

Waxahachie.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Shirley:

I have four brothers. Four brothers, yeah, and two sisters.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were any of your brothers in World War II?

Mr. Shirley:

Yes, I had a brother that was older than I that was in the Marine Corps when the war started. His name was Carven. He was in Able Company and I was in Baker Company, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, the 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment, 1<sup>st</sup> Division.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did he get overseas into combat also?

Mr. Shirley:

He went through Guadalcanal, Cape Gloucester and Okinawa

Mr. Misenhimer:

He's not still living is he?

Mr. Shirley:

No, he died in 1994.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were any of your other brothers in World War II?

Mr. Shirley:

I had a younger brother, he was in World War II although he didn't get in to start with. He was about your age. Then another one that was in the Navy, but he wasn't in the war. He was on the Enterprise. He was in the Navy and on the Enterprise.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The aircraft carrier, Enterprise.

Mr. Shirley:

The aircraft carrier, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How about your sisters? Did they do any kind of war work?

Mr. Shirley:

I had a sister that worked in Birmingham at one of the factories there that was making airplanes for us, I think.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Is she still living?

Mr. Shirley:

No, they are all dead. I have one sister that's still living.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now you grew up during the Depression. How did the Depression affect you and your family?

Mr. Shirley:

Well, it caused me to not get the education that I should have had. One reason was that the books you had to buy books and to go out on further than the eighth grade, you had to go to high school and that was seven miles away and you had to go by bus which was owned by an individual and

you had to pay to ride it. Of course my father said “we don’t have the money for you to ride that bus.” So we just followed old Nick with the plow and we just lived on a farm of course.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You all lived on a farm during the Depression then?

Mr. Shirley:

Yes, we did.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you own the farm or were you renting it?

Mr. Shirley:

My father owned it. It was up in north central Alabama and they was coal there and so he eventually sold the land to a coal company that had a steam shovel there and was stripping that coal.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you lived in Alabama during that time, is that right?

Mr. Shirley:

Yes, I was born in Waxahachie and we lived there and then we moved to Palestine and then to Houston and then in 1925 we went back to Alabama. That’s where my parents came from and what they was doing in Waxahachie, I think my father had some kinfolks there. I guess that’s the reason that we was there. I’m not certain of it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You were about six years old when you moved back to Alabama then?

Mr. Shirley:

Yeah, right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's where you grew up. What was your last year of school then?

Mr. Shirley:

I graduated from the eighth grade. I used my brother's books so that meant that he graduated from eighth grade also. He didn't go to the ninth grade so he didn't have no books and my parents, my father said we couldn't buy no books so that was during the Depression.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you do when you quit school then?

Mr. Shirley:

Work on the farm.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now December 7, 1941 Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. Shirley:

Yes, I had a first cousin that called me. We was living in Birmingham at that time. She called me and told me about it. I was greatly surprised about anything like that because the news, you know, all the kind of news you got back then was radio or newspaper or something like that and when I heard about that, of course you kept the radio on and get all that information and one thing and another like that. That was on a Sunday that Pearl Harbor happened. The next week I tried to join the Marine Corps. My brother, Carven, my oldest brother was in the Marine Corps at that time and so the reason that I decided to go in the Marine Corps was because he was in it but at that time there was a draft going on and I'd registered for the draft and I had a D-1 draft card. That meant that my mother was depending on me and so when I went down to join the Marine Corps they told me "you can't join because you got a D-1 draft card and you'll have to get that

changed to A-1". So I got my mother to sign an affidavit saying she wasn't dependent on me any more and I went down there. So I was in the Marine Corps on the sixteenth of December 1941, headed toward Parris Island, South Carolina.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now had your father passed away?

Mr. Shirley:

No, no. He passed away in 1969.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Your mother was dependent on you, I didn't know why.

Mr. Shirley:

They got a divorce many years, during the Depression some time or another. I think it was probably about 1930 or something like that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I see. How did you choose the Marine Corps?

Mr. Shirley:

Because of my brother being in it. How he come to choose it, I don't know.

Mr. Misenhimer:

But that's the reason you chose the Marine Corps.

Mr. Shirley:

Yes, it was.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And you went to Parris Island for your boot camp?

Mr. Shirley:

I went to Parris Island for the boot camp and then to New River, North Carolina, which is Camp Lejeune now for basic training.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about your boot camp. How was that?

Mr. Shirley:

Well, it wasn't too bad. It wasn't like it is now I don't think. They was trying to get you through there so they could form the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division so it wasn't too awful bad. It was probably worse than we thought it was, maybe or something like that but we even played football in there. I got tackled and I had to go to sick bay to get my head sewed up.

Mr. Misenhimer:

About how long was your boot camp?

Mr. Shirley:

It wasn't but about a month or so, I guess. Maybe a couple of months. Now let's see, about half of it was boot camp. We left North Carolina the first of June so that means about three months each. Two and a half months, each one of them, you know boot camp and then basic training.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now in boot camp did you have a lot of weapons training?

Mr. Shirley:

At boot camp, no. We had a rifle range. In basic training I think we had some rifle range and also 45 Thompson sub-machine gun.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what kind of rifle did you have?



Mr. Shirley:

We had the old '03 Springfield rifle. It was a bolt action.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you do a lot of marching?

Mr. Shirley:

Well, I don't remember too much marching but I expect we did more, not as much as they do now I don't guess but we did quite a bit I think.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were your Drill Instructors pretty tough on you?

Mr. Shirley:

They were pretty tough but they wasn't as tough as the ones that's there now according to what I've seen on television.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When did you meet Charles Loeschorn?

Mr. Shirley:

I'll tell you the first time I saw Charles Loeschorn he was a runner for the message center on Guadalcanal.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You didn't meet him during basic training then?

Mr. Shirley:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What else happened there at boot camp or basic training?

Mr. Shirley:

Well, we lived in you know if you wanted a bed but what you done, you called your rifle a gun, or you wound up with the thing dirty. You got to sleep with it. Another thing is they expected you to slap them when they order "Order arms" you know, you slapped them pieces, and make a noise. If you didn't you'd get down on the ground and slap the ground. Cold up there. You didn't volunteer for anything. Some of them, they wanted to know if they had somebody there that would like to volunteer to drive a truck you know. Had two or three and I saw them later on, they was shoving a wheelbarrow.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's one of the first things you learn: do not volunteer.

Mr. Shirley:

You wasn't in the Marine Corps then.

Mr. Misenhimer:

No, I was in the Army. Now when you finished basic training, then what happened?

Mr. Shirley:

Well, when I got through basic training in June of 1942, we boarded a train for San Francisco and they was all Pullmans when we left and we went to San Francisco and we boarded the U.S.S. Barnett there in San Francisco and I think that was June 22, 1942 that we boarded that ship.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And you went to where?

Mr. Shirley:

We went to New Zealand.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was that trip down there?

Mr. Shirley:

It wasn't bad, I don't guess. The first time I was on board.. Well we went on an exercise while we were there in basic training we went on a ship up in Chesapeake Bay to practice landing you know. So that wasn't the first time I was on board a ship though on the Barnett but it was something new and one thing and another like I said but my brother, he went on a liberty. He was with them and of course he was in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba at the time the war started. By the time I went through boot camp and even when I was in basic training. I went up there for basic training and he was in the 7<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment there on Guantanamo Bay. He came up there and he got me transferred to his outfit but while he was getting me transferred, they transferred him to A Company. He was a Mess Sergeant. He was Charles Loeschorn's cook. He went through Guadalcanal, Cape Gloucester and to the other place, Okinawa.

Mr. Misenhimer:

This was your brother?

Mr. Shirley:

Yeah, my brother.

Mr. Misenhimer:

He didn't go to Peleliu, is that right?

Mr. Shirley:

No, he didn't go to Peleliu. After Cape Gloucester he was brought back to the States. But then when I got back to the States, he was back in training or somewhere or another and he went over to Okinawa.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, on your trip down to New Zealand, was there much seasickness?

Mr. Shirley:

Well, there were quite a few people seasick but I never did get... I did get seasick I guess but I never did vomit or anything like that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now on the way down were you with other ships? Were you in a convoy?

Mr. Shirley:

I guess we were, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any submarine alerts along the way?

Mr. Shirley:

No we didn't but you know we didn't have no alerts there but at least I don't remember any so I don't think we did but the ships would zigzag you know. They would go one way and then back another all the way down there and all the way back.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How long did it take to get down to New Zealand?

Mr. Shirley:

Well, I don't really know but I think it was probably about a week I guess.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh, OK. Tell me what happened when you got to New Zealand.

Mr. Shirley:

I believe we stayed on the ship. We was able to go on liberty and one thing and another like that

and we had to unload the ship and reload it again because unload it and then reload it for combat. It took about well I guess we left there around the second or third of August before Guadalcanal. I don't remember now exactly when we left and one thing. I probably got an autobiography here that I wrote. It was cold and rain. We had cornflakes all over the dock there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I understand the stevedores were on strike down there.

Mr. Shirley:

They were. That's the reason we had to do that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now let me go back. You say your brother got you transferred to his outfit? Was that the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines then?

Mr. Shirley:

Yeah, he got me transferred to the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines Regiment. That was the one that was Chesty Puller was in. He was Battalion Commander there of the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines Regiment.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When was that?

Mr. Shirley:

Well, that was when I went from Parris Island to basic in New River, North Carolina. I probably have some dates on that but I don't remember.

Mr. Misenhimer:

But that was at the time of basic training?

Mr. Shirley:

Yeah, at the time of basic training I was in the 7<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment but when he got transferred,

whenever he would up in Able Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Regiment. Then he knew I was in the 7<sup>th</sup> so he got me transferred over to 1<sup>st</sup> Marines.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I wanted to get that clarified. That's how you got back to the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines.

Mr. Shirley:

Yeah, he was in Able Company and he got me transferred over there and they put me in Baker Company.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was this about the time you finished up your basic training or when was that?

Mr. Shirley:

No, that was when I went up to get the basic training.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK, they put you back in the 1<sup>st</sup> then.

Mr. Shirley:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK, that's what I wanted to know. So you actually during basic training you were in B-1-1.

Mr. Shirley:

Yeah, right. Only in the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines just when I got there and got transferred back to the Baker Company.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK, I just wanted to make sure about that. OK, good. Now when you were in New Zealand, what did you live in there?

Mr. Shirley:

Ship.

Mr. Misenhimer:

On the ship?

Mr. Shirley:

Yeah, we stayed on the ship.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK. On the Barnett?

Mr. Shirley:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you left there to go to Guadalcanal, then what happened?

Mr. Shirley:

Well, we went back on the Barnett... Going to Guadalcanal, we was supposed to have a practice landing in the Fiji Islands but that all got cancelled due to the fact that they had coral there that you couldn't, a man couldn't get on those islands without getting cut up. I don't know whether that had anything to do with the landing there on Guadalcanal or not. I don't know but whenever we wasn't able to practice landing there then that's when they told us we were going to Guadalcanal.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about landing at Guadalcanal.

Mr. Shirley:

Well there wasn't no opposition and of course we thought there wouldn't be no problem there no

way because of all of the bombing and everything like that. If there'd been opposition there we'd have had our hands full, I can tell you that. We were all new to that stuff and never had any landing or anything like that except they had just landed up there. We did land there and then we went on a patrol and I didn't see but three live Japs in all the three landings. Two of them was on Guadalcanal and of course they was on a truck that had been bombed and tore up and of course they was tore up too. They couldn't get off the truck. They were hurt, one of them probably had their legs blowed off. The other one was hurt also in the legs, couldn't walk and of course we just left them there because there wasn't anything we could do with them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Shirley:

We just made that thing and we made a patrol and then when we come back I guess to our living area, camping area or whatever you call it, and of course we changed our place from where we were staying every now and then we'd go to a different place and sometimes they'd go... One time they wanted somebody to volunteer to be a runner to that message center. So I volunteered for that and that's how I met Charles Loeschorn. He volunteered also. Of course that was kind of a yardbird job but I must say, nobody could outrun me at school. I thought well you know they want a runner, that's me.

Mr. Misenhimer:

About when did you become a runner? How long had you been there?

Mr. Shirley:

We'd been there probably about two months I guess.



Mr. Misenhimer:

When was your first combat?

Mr. Shirley:

We wasn't involved in that combat for... We just happened to be at the right place at the right time everywhere. After I got to be message center runner they was up on the front lines one time and one night they got in a firefight and they were shooting up flares and they run out of flares and they called battalion headquarters and said "send us some flares." So that's what the runner done. They got me to carry the flares up there. The other runner, he got sick whenever anything like that was going to happen, he'd get sick. So I carried the flares up there. They told me when I was going, they said, "you need to be careful. You got a secondary line between here and the front line and you better be careful or they'll get you." So that meant that you had a password that they used a password every day. It changed every day, too. It was always something with an L in it because the Japs, that was one of the things they couldn't, anything with an L in it they couldn't pronounce very good. So the password was hallelujah so you know they'd take about three steps and holler hallelujah, hallelujah. So that way I got them to the front lines. Then I did remember going through that secondary line up there and my brother since he was a field cook he was a Mess Sergeant, he was in that line. So we went through that and got the flares up there and then of course later on I found out that they were just firing. They thought there was Japs out there and there never were.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When they had the battle of Alligator Creek or Tenaru River, you weren't anywhere near that then?

Mr. Shirley:

No, the night that they had that thing, of course they had that in the morning right at 0200 or 0300 or something like that. That night the Japs shelled us in there and they were shelling us with 14-inch shells. Well, they shelled us most of the night with 14-inch shells and then we were in reserve. Then in the morning they had that firefight up there and when it all stopped and one thing and another, like that, and it got daylight, they told us well, we're going to go across the Tenaru up there and we'd do some patrolling up there, find out if we was finding any Japs up there. Well, up the river there, we called it a river well, you know what I'm talking about. They had some of those amphibious tanks in the river there and they built a bridge across on top of them. That's how we got across there. Then we went over there, patrolling, and we didn't see no live Japs at all. We did see a lot of dead ones there and while we were marching up this beach there, going back to our regular area, that beach there just at high tide the water got over it and into the Tenaru and then when the tide goes down, sometimes the water'd drain out of the Tenaru back into the ocean. Then whenever it got to running back into there you had a beach there that you could go from one side to the other side, across the Tenaru and that's where the Japs were. I think they killed about 35 of our men and wounded about 70 but they were about 800 of those Japs laying up there on that beach. Couldn't hardly walk up the beach without stepping on them. Boy, we had a fellow named McCarty that got killed there. We never did know what killed him, whether it was enemy fire or friendly fire. We never did see nobody but wondered where in the world did that fire come from. As far as I know, they never did find out. Everything seemed... There was always old Washing Machine Charley. He'd come up just about every night and you know what he was, don't you?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes, sir. Well, tell me about him so people know that are listening.

Mr. Shirley:

Washing Machine Charley that was his thing, every night just about, he'd fly around up there, condition red and of course he's doing just exactly what they wanted to do and then before it was all over with, they'd drop their bomb and leave, you know, and back the next night again. We went on a patrol there up along the Lungga River there. In the first place a fellow named Captain Williams, he was in charge of the Baker Company, and we was supposed to go up in the jungle there but the jungle was so thick that they decided they'd just go up the river because at that time of the year there wasn't nothing but just a little old branch coming down the river so nobody, wasn't enough water in there hardly to drink, much less to wet your feet but we went up the Lungaa River there and it kind of turned around to the left, bent around to the left, and when we did a machine gun opened up on us. Of course there was kind of a low place there in the river so whatever ones they was able to get out of the way, they got down there and of course I was in back, toward the end of it, and the Lieutenant told us, "Well, we'll go up on this side of the river and see if we can get across from that machine gun. We'll see if we can't put that out of whack." So we finally found a little old trail and went up that trail and found an open place there and just about we found that open place, that machine gun opened up on us. Lieutenant said, "Well, I want three of you volunteers to go up that trail and find out where that fire's coming from." Well, a feller named DeBele and one named Secor jumped up to go up there and I looked around at that Lieutenant and he gave me that sign and said, "Get your ass going." So I jumped up and took out after them and DeBele and Secor got hit up there and fell and got killed up there. Well, I didn't get hurt. I just went back you know and he asked me about where were DeBele and Secor and I said, "They got hit up there." Well, finally we started to get out of here, "let's go." So we did. We got out of there and of course when we was up there and got the machine gun all on to

us well that bunch down in the river they moved out and was going. What they'd done, if they'd kept the machine gun on them, they'd have killed more of them you know. Anyway we got back to camp, back to our area there, there was 29 missing but ten came back. One of them was Harry Dunn. He was a feller that went on liberty that whenever he came back he was AWOL and he got back just before we was fixing to leave Camp Lejeune up there at New River, North Carolina. So they first they said there wasn't going, he'd have to stay and then I guess the company commander said, "You can go. We'll take you with us but you're going to be a prisoner-at-large all the time." Well, Harry he was one that got cut off up there and he couldn't come back, not with the rest of them so he had to hide and one thing and another like that but he finally wound up seeing Jack Morrison up there and Jack was hit, wounded, he couldn't walk, one thing and another, so Harry started bringing him back and he finally got him back. Took him two days to bring him back, hiding and keeping the Japs from finding them and putting his hand over his mouth to keep him from grunting too much and one thing and another like that. Harry got the Navy Cross for it. Of course I think they took him off from being a prisoner-at-large. We also had Pistol Pete there. He would fire two or three rounds a day down there at our outfit. Of course one of the big things that we landed there was for Henderson Field. That was the Japs was just building that thing and it wasn't where the ships' airplanes could land on it or anything like that. It didn't take our men, once they had landed on it and they started working on it, didn't take them a week until they had the airplanes coming in on the thing. Had nineteen men killed that day.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How many men on the patrol?

Mr. Shirley:

I guess it was a couple hundred of them, something like that. The whole company, I don't know.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The whole company. That's a big patrol then. OK.

Mr. Shirley:

The whole company. Of course we was on a patrol one night and we wound up on one of those bloody hill knobs up there, whatever you call it, and we stayed all night up there and we could see that ship at sea out there and they got in a battle out there. That was a beautiful sight just to see them tracers going all through the sky and one thing and another like that. You'd see a ship every once in a while blow up. We thought then, "You know that's good that our ships taking those other ones out" when fact was most all of them getting hit was ours. I don't know a whole lot about... Seemed to me like our company was always in the right place at the right time. Of course I was in Headquarters Company so they was a lot of stuff that I didn't get into. I guess it was good for me to not be involved in that thing. Our company didn't lose a whole lot of men over there but then when we left there, we left there around the last part of December 1942 and we went down to Brisbane, Australia and that's where we was going to go but when we had somebody to get off there and check out the place where we'd be and one thing and another like that, well they come back and said "We're not going to land here. We're not going to get off here and stay because there's more mosquitoes here than there was on Guadalcanal." We had so many men with malaria that's one thing they need to do is try to get some of those well. My brother, Carven, he had malaria and so it took nine months at Melbourne, Australia for us to get back into shape and fit for battle again.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now on Guadalcanal as a runner, what weapon did you carry?

Mr. Shirley:

I carried a carbine.

Mr. Misenhimer:

30 caliber carbine?

Mr. Shirley:

Yeah, 30-caliber carbine, yeah. Well, to start with, I guess I had that old '03 rifle. But I didn't stay as a runner too awful long. I don't know exactly when...Lieutenant Fisher, he was a communications officer, and he asked me one day and also Charles Loeschorn, he asked us if we wanted to be a telephone man in communications and he got us transferred to Headquarters Company as telephone man.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you do as a telephone man?

Mr. Shirley:

Well, we'd take times about being on the switchboard. You had a switchboard that people'd call and of course you'd also string lines from the Headquarters Company, Battalion Headquarters, to the companies and also to the regimental switchboard. It wasn't a bad job but you'd liable to run into something or other just like on one of the places there I was going to string a line to one of the companies. There was one of them ducks

Mr. Misenhimer:

LVT or something?

Mr. Shirley:

Yeah. LVT. They were going across the water there and they asked me, "Do you want a ride?" I said, "Yeah. I got to string a line." They said, "OK." So all I done was ride and let that roll of

wire undo you know. I forgot now how I got back.

Mr. Misenhimer:

But you got across with the wire then?

Mr. Shirley:

Yeah. Of course that was on Peleliu.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That was Peleliu, that wasn't Guadalcanal?

Mr. Shirley:

No. We didn't have much of anything. We had the Tenaru River and then the Lungga River and of course they had another one there but I don't know what it was. The Matanikau or something like that. I never did see that place but

Mr. Misenhimer:

There was a Matanikau River.

Mr. Shirley:

I never did see it but if I did well I don't remember it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

On Guadalcanal you didn't have a lot of combat then, is that right?

Mr. Shirley:

No, I didn't have much combat. I don't think our company did either.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever fire your gun at the enemy?

Mr. Shirley:

I never did see no enemy. The only time I saw...I saw three live Japs on Guadalcanal and of

course they were wounded. They didn't have any guns. They were on a truck and as far as I know, they are still on it. Of course they are not but you know I don't know what happened to them and on Cape Gloucester I saw a live Jap there and to tell you the truth, I never did fire a gun because you were warned when you fire that gun you better be firing at something. If I didn't see anything there wasn't no use...I know that whenever I carried those flares to the company up there, where the Marines was firing their '03 rifles or not, I don't know if they were firing it or not. I know that there was 37mm cannon there, whatever you want to call them, they burned the barrel up on it but they wasn't nobody out there after all the firing. The next day we found out there wasn't nothing out there. They killed some wild pigs or something.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When they had the Battle of Bloody Ridge, you weren't around that then?

Mr. Shirley:

No, we wasn't up there. We was on the Bloody Ridge one time but I think that was before the Japs was able to bring a bunch of their troops back in there again. They did bring one ship I know of that was a troop carrier out there that they beached that thing and it stayed there until somebody sunk it I guess. They pulled it off of there and sunk it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

It's still there.

Mr. Shirley:

Is it still there?

Mr. Misenhimer:

I've seen it down there, right.



Mr. Shirley:

OK. Well, I didn't know it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

It's almost rusted away but it's still there.

Mr. Shirley:

Well, I'll be doggoned.

Mr. Misenhimer:

There's two of them in fact.

Mr. Shirley:

I never did see but one. About Henderson Field. I guess that's a big, they can land the biggest airplanes on it I guess.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh, yeah, they can land jets there.

Mr. Shirley:

There's a fella lives back of me here, he's been back over there two or three times, to Okinawa.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Is he a veteran? Was he there during the war?

Mr. Shirley:

No, he wasn't there. I don't know. He's got a lot of education. I think he's spent...He's retired out of the Navy or something. Then he was a school teacher, I think.

Mr. Misenhimer:

All right. Then you went to Melbourne?

Mr. Shirley:

Yeah, we went to Melbourne and we were lucky. Our outfit I think the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was put in the Melbourne cricket grounds. We stayed there until we went up to Dandene. We went up there and we had a lot of rain and they'd had bulldozers out there, leveling that place off, and put us some barracks up there. No, I guess it was tents, for us to sleep in and one thing, the streets was just nothing but mud. We stayed out there until they sent us to New Guinea. We went to New Guinea, Goodenough Island. We did some training and one thing and another like that, getting ready to take Gloucester. Of course we were supposed to be in an area that the Japs, well the Japs bombed us one time there. They might have done more than that, too, but I never did see but one airplane drop bombs. We stayed there until we went to land on Cape Gloucester.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I'd like to go back and ask you some questions about Australia. Did you get a chance to see many of the Australian people?

Mr. Shirley:

Oh, yeah. I went with a young lady there. As a matter of fact, that brother of mine went back after the war and married. Got engaged to a girl there and went back after the war and married her. He lived there until he died in 1994 but he had three children and all of them got doctor's degrees in education. One of them has been over here. Well the last time he was here I think was in 2001. He is Dr. Dean Shirley; he is in a highly educated business over there. I think he was just a head of one up where they lived up there but now he is in Australian education.

Mr. Misenhimer:

But the people there were friendly, were they?

Mr. Shirley:

Oh, yeah. They was friendly. They was glad we landed. We did a parade down there one time

and those people were the most friendliest people that you have ever seen I guess. They were glad we came because if we hadn't landed on Guadalcanal, the Japs would probably been assigned to land over there, you know. So they were glad to see us. Of course I was glad to see them, too.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then you went to Goodenough Island off New Guinea then?

Mr. Shirley:

Right. We left New Guinea and I don't even know, we was on an LST and we landed on Cape Gloucester I think on December 25, 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What all happened there?

Mr. Shirley:

Well, it rained and there was a lot of fighting in there and I don't know...I was with Headquarters Company then and we had areas that Headquarters Company was in, you know, and one thing and another like that, and we was sleeping in hammocks. They had a top to it, you didn't get wet at night when the wind was blowing and also had mosquito nets on both sides of it. It was good and I liked that. I guess the reason I didn't have malaria is due to the fact that I fought those mosquitoes all night long. I never seen as much mud in my life as there was there on Cape Gloucester.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now on Cape Gloucester, was there much fighting there?

Mr. Shirley:

Now Cape Gloucester they took a long while for them to get rid of the Japs and one thing and

another like that because there was so much water and raining. The only other Jap that I saw alive was one that was on Cape Gloucester that give up, wanted to be a prisoner because he had went to school in California and graduated from college there so he had a job giving himself up without getting killed.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you still a telephone lineman there?

Mr. Shirley:

Yeah, I was still in communications, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And you ran telephone lines to different places?

Mr. Shirley:

Yeah, well we didn't have too many lines. I think they'd got into communications with radio and one thing and another there. It was raining so much you know that it was hard to do anything.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What else happened there?

Mr. Shirley:

Well, not much of anything. I know that when we got through there I don't know how the companies did all their...It took us as long there to clean that place up one thing and another as it did on Guadalcanal. It took about five months to win that thing over away from the Japs. Of course I thought then well Rabaul was right down on the other end of the island and so I thought then we was fixing to go to Rabaul and that was one of the things that they was talking about but that changed because I think that Rabaul, it wasn't playing a big part in anything. At one time it was. All the airplanes they'd come bombing us was out of there. I don't think, I don't remember

them bombing us at all up there at Cape Gloucester. When we left Cape Gloucester we went down to Pavuvu Island. That was down in the Solomon Islands.

Mr. Misenhimer:

It's in the Russell Islands, not too far off of Guadalcanal.

Mr. Shirley:

OK.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was that?

Mr. Shirley:

It was all right except all it was, was rats, mosquitoes and flies. You had coconut trees there that was coconuts all over the ground and that was one of the things that the mosquitoes liked was those coconuts, stuff like that, that had a little bit of water in them. So we had a job cleaning that place up. Since I was in the telephone thing, they had those things that you put on your legs that you could stick in the trees and climb. So I got some exercise, climbing those coconut trees, getting those coconuts out of there to keep them from falling on the camps and stuff.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I've heard people complain about Pavuvu.

Mr. Shirley:

There was Army there I think.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Mainly Marines I've heard, they didn't like Pavuvu.

Mr. Shirley:

Well, it was just, what it was, was just a place of rest, R&R I guess that's what you call it. As far

as I know that's the only thing that was there. We went back to Pavuvu Island, we stayed there until we went to Peleliu.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You came there from Cape Gloucester, right?

Mr. Shirley:

Yeah, we went there from Cape Gloucester, to Pavuvu and we stayed there until we were ready for Peleliu.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about Peleliu. When did you go there?

Mr. Shirley:

I believe it was September of 1944, I guess.

Mr. Misenhimer:

According to my notes, September 15, 1944 when it started there.

Mr. Shirley:

Well, we didn't stay there but about two weeks. It was fast and furious. We landed there one day and we didn't get no more than about a hundred yards off the beach that first day and I know that communications that we was in, we was stopped by a disabled Jap tank up there. There was a half of a Japanese, the top half, where the bottom half was I don't know. It was laying on the ground there. Of course we didn't have to worry about him. A couple of days later we was over at the blockhouse. It was about maybe a quarter of a mile from where we was at and there was a tank trap there. I guess that's what you call it. A thing about ten foot deep and about thirty or forty foot wide to keep the tanks out of. I don't know how big it was but there was a lot of dead Marines at the bottom of that thing. Also there was a blockhouse over there that the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion

set up their headquarters there in that blockhouse and so we had to set up the switchboard up there also. So I was setting the switchboard up, cleaning that place out, because there'd been some sixteen-inch shells that went through that thing. So that meant there was a lot of pieces of concrete in that thing and I had to clean that place out so I could put that switchboard up and there I felt something soft. I raised it up and it was a hand. But there was Japs underneath that blockhouse, too. They come out at night and of course I don't think they ever done anything except got killed. We lost a lot of men there. As a matter of fact is, they had sick bay. They'd bring them in there and I know there was a feller that I knew they brought him in there one night and said, "Old Gary, they just brought him in." He was from Baker Company and he died there. It was just bad there. We had Chesty Puller as Regimental Commander there. He was the most decorated Marine there was.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever meet him?

Mr. Shirley:

I remember meeting him but not as far as shaking hands. I remember standing there with the company commander or something there, talking to him one time and I remember him talking to somebody there and I remember looking at him and I thought then he wasn't no bigger than me but apparently he was tough though.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you think of him?

Mr. Shirley:

I didn't think too much of him because at that time I didn't know anything about him. You know you didn't get too much information about him and one thing and another like that until after the

war. Then after the war and he went to Korea, then he gets so much publicity and then you get to thinking I remember talking to him. I remember him being our commanding officer.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's some other things that happened on Peleliu?

Mr. Shirley:

Well, I remember one time that they told me, they said, "You need to go up to that company up there on the front line. They need a telephone." So I said, "OK" and I strung a wire up there to them and when I got up there well I hooked the telephone up to it and it didn't have a complete circuit. I said, "Something's wrong with the line." So I started following it back to the switchboard and got back down there at a place where there was kind of an old road of some sort there and saw the thing had been blowed in two with a mortar shell. I said, "Oh, Lord" and we always strung those things with enough slack in them to be able to splice them back together again and so I pulled the ends together and I started splicing them and I said, "Well, I'd better get over here in the ditch there because something might happen." And sure enough a mortar shell landed right where it had before. So something told me to get out of the way and I guess I was lucky that it did because if I hadn't, the line wouldn't have got spliced.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You wouldn't have got home either.

Mr. Shirley:

That's about right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What else happened?

Mr. Shirley:



Well, when we come back to the States, you know, one of the things was that after we got a thirty day leave, we was to report back to Norfolk, Virginia, so I did and when I got up there they come in there one time, somebody did, and said "They're looking for somebody to go seagoing." I don't know if you know what that is.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me, what is seagoing?

Mr. Shirley:

Seagoing is where on almost all the battleships, cruisers and destroyers has got a Marine on there, some Marines, and they needed one for a ship that was in drydock there, being repaired. So I volunteered for that and they accepted me and then they come down there one day, about three or four days after that, and told me and told me, "You got a communication warrant, you cannot be on ship so we're going to transfer you to Camp Lejeune for further training." Well I went down to Camp Lejeune. The day I went down there, somebody kept saying something about somebody dying or something like that. Finally I asked somebody, "Who in the world they talking about?" They said, "Franklin D. Roosevelt died today." That was a sad day for most everybody that was in the service I think.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That was April 12, 1945.

Mr. Shirley:

I got down there and about all... We didn't get no more training there. That's when I saw Charles Loeschorn again and so he'd asked me one day, "You want to play some golf?" I said, "I guess so. I don't know. I've never played any." He said, "Come on, we'll go over to John Lewis's." He was a runner for A Company also and he was a professional golfer. So he was in charge of the

golf course there at Camp Lejeune. He told me, "Old Lewis is up there at the golf course." I said, "OK." We went up there and he gave us some clubs and everything. We played golf. That was the first time I ever played golf. I liked it. But anyway we went through our basic training there and we headed for Camp Pendleton, fixing to go overseas again. That was when the war ended, while we was at Camp Pendleton so I was glad about that. That's where I got discharged from Camp Pendleton.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What date did you get discharged?

Mr. Shirley:

September 25, 1945.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's some other things that happened?

Mr. Shirley:

I don't know. Have you got e-mail?

Mr. Misenhimer:

No, I don't have.

Mr. Shirley:

HermanShirley, I guess anyway you want to at Comcast.net.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Is Herman Shirley one word or two?

Mr. Shirley:

One word, hermanshirley all the way across and it's at Comcast.net.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What would you consider your most frightening time?

Mr. Shirley:

I don't know. You know just...I should have been frightened at Peleliu, when we landed on there. I should have been frightened but sometime I think I didn't have sense enough to know what was going on. As far as whenever I went up that trail with that fire coming down through there, it killed some of the men of the platoon that was in there up in the front where DeBele and Secor went up that trail and I followed them and where they got killed, I didn't have time enough to get scared there. I don't know. I just always felt, well, we've got to do this to get it over with. I remember shells coming in there. I thought then the way that those shells burst overhead there and that I don't know what you call it, where that stuff falling down you know.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Shrapnel?

Mr. Shirley:

No, it's not shrapnel, it's one that gives light.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Those flares, whatever, parachute shells whatever they call them.

Mr. Shirley:

It burns, you know. It's coming down and it looked like to me...I was kind of afraid then. They'd come down almost to twelve foot off the ground before they'd burn out, you know. I thought then, we're going to get burned up with those shells. That was when the Japs were shelling us with 14-inch battleship shells just before the battle of the Tenaru up there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was the morale in your outfit?

Mr. Shirley:

I think it was always good. Of course you see I was just in communications in the last couple of campaigns, Cape Gloucester and Peleliu, and the ones that was on the front lines I don't know...there was a lot of them got killed. I remember on the back of this old breed we had all the people that died from the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division in the four campaigns that they were in. That was Guadalcanal, Cape Gloucester, Peleliu and Okinawa. I remember underscoring all them people in there. Of course I now I go through them and I say well I'm glad I underscored them because I don't remember now who they were.

Mr. Misenhimer:

There was a lot of people killed, right.

Mr. Shirley:

After the war was over, of course this goes back to the year 2000 and one thing and another like that, maybe 1995 or something like that, there was somebody in the Marine Corps, the Baker Company that wanted them to get together, everybody that could. I remember being at some of those meetings, I was at four or five of them and the first one I think was at Clearwater, Florida and another was in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and San Antonio and Chattanooga, Tennessee and all of the men there, you know I wasn't in there at the end of the war, maybe halfway through it but anyway they was a lot of them that I knew and one thing and another. As a matter of fact, I don't know if there is any of them still living or not. I knew two or three of them that I know that's dead. I don't know any of them that I know that are still living.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you went to several reunions then?

Mr. Shirley:

I did, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get home from the war with any souvenirs?

Mr. Shirley:

No, you know I didn't think anything about getting souvenirs. Matter of fact is, after I got out of the service, the first job I got was streetcar operator in Birmingham, Alabama. You know as far as uniform, I didn't keep them. I just threw them away because I didn't think anything about anything. I was just proud that I'd got out of it. I know a lot of them, they was some of them wanted to know, "You didn't save your blues? Dress blues?" I never had any in the first place. In the second place, I never did see anybody wearing them all the time I was in the service. Never saw anybody wearing them. So I don't know...

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Shirley:

I don't remember having any problems. I was hired to work for the Birmingham Electric Company as streetcar operator and bus driver and one thing and another like that. My brother that was in the Navy, he got out and he wanted me and him to go into the service station business. So I quit my job as a streetcar operator and we went into service station business and that's one thing I kind of felt like I didn't have no business being in because you got to watch everything, everybody coming in and you got to work so hard and everything like that, long

hours, short pay. After we'd been in that for a while he wanted to go into the trucking business; we did. We bought some eighteen wheelers, well it wasn't eighteen wheelers, they didn't have eighteen wheelers back then but one of the big ones, International outfit and we did that for a while. Then he got married and I had to do it by myself. I don't know...

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross any time?

Mr. Shirley:

The only time I had any experience with the Red Cross was when we was in Melbourne, Australia. They had a Red Cross there and that's the only place that had coffee that you liked. You bought a cup of coffee in restaurants in Melbourne or any place down there, they'd bring you hot water and a bottle of stuff you poured out into that hot water, according to how you liked it or anything. I didn't like it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose on the radio?

Mr. Shirley:

Yeah, we did on Guadalcanal. I remember hearing...and a lot of times we heard her on Guadalcanal but I'd get to thinking, I said "How in the world do we hear her or anything like that." I guess somebody must have had something or other. Things back then if they wanted to use a radio to call anybody or talk to anybody, then they had a thing there that something that you pedaled, like a generator. You pedaled it to get juice and to use the radio. So I don't know where in the world we heard her at but I heard her somewhere.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What medals and ribbons did you get?

Mr. Shirley:

I didn't get any except just the ribbons that I was qualified to get and that was Good Conduct Medal and all of that stuff, the war zone.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The Atlantic-Pacific?

Mr. Shirley:

Yeah, there was one of them that I had four stars on.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Four battle stars?

Mr. Shirley:

Yeah. But as far as any of the other stuff, I had expert rifleman.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When Japan surrendered August 15, 1945, did you all have a celebration then?

Mr. Shirley:

I guess we did but we were at Camp Pendleton at that time and fixing to go overseas and I remember them...we celebrated I guess but as far as getting into anything, drinking or anything, I don't remember anything like that. I remember whenever they discharged me, I think they gave me a hundred dollars and told me to take off. So I hitchhiked most of the way and of course with your uniform on why you didn't have too much of a problem getting a ride. Of course I come to Texas in 1947 after me and my brother went into the trucking business and service station and I got out and I said I've got a brother that was younger than me. He was out here and he was working for the railroad and so I come out here in 1947 and I finally got on the railroad and I worked there thirty-one years before I retired.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well, Herman, anything else you recall from your time in World War II?

Mr. Shirley:

No, I can't think of anything, you know. If I can, I'll send you this autobiography.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well, Herman, thanks again for your time today and for your service to our country.

*End of Interview*

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