

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

The Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview With
Roy William Roush
September 5, 2012
Woodlands, CA
Company E, 2nd Battalion
6th Marines, 2nd Marine Division
Tarawa

My name is Richard Misenhimer: Today is September 5, 2012. I am interviewing Mr. Roy William Roush by telephone. His phone number is 818-888-5416. His address is 5150 Escebedo Drive, Woodlands, CA 91360. 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:

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

Mr. Roush:

Well, thank you very much. I'm sure that all the veterans of World War II appreciate what you're doing.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Thank you, thank you. Now, the first thing I need to do is read to you this agreement with the museum. So let me read this to you. (agreement read) Is that OK with you?

Mr. Roush:

That's fine with me..

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now the next thing I'd like to do is get an alternative contact. We find out that sometimes several years down the road, we try to get back in contact with a veteran, he's moved or something. So do you have a son or daughter or some one we could contact if we needed to?

Mr. Roush:

All right, it's Donald Roush, and his number is 972-279-4066.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's your brother.

Mr. Roush:

That's my brother and he was in the Marine Corps in the Korean War and he saw quite a bit of combat over there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh, I'll tell you that Korean War was rough.

Mr. Roush:

He had some close calls.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah. Now where were you born?

Mr. Roush:

I was born in Alva, Oklahoma. It's a little county seat town in northwestern Oklahoma, not far from where the panhandle comes in.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Mr. Roush:

Just my one younger brother, Donald.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And he was in the Korean War.

Mr. Roush:

He was in the Korean War.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then where did you go to high school?

Mr. Roush:

I went to high school in Enid, Oklahoma.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When did you graduate there?

Mr. Roush:

That's another story. I didn't graduate. Like many of the others that were in the area, education was interrupted by the war. Actually, when I was still seventeen they were talking about drafting everybody on their eighteenth birthday, whether they were in school or not. At that time we were really desperate and it was somewhat justified in thinking that. However, I guess in actuality it really didn't turn out on taking them on their eighteenth birthday. Normally they let people who were eighteen go ahead and graduate before they were eligible for the draft. But it scared a lot of us and you know since I was about three years old and I saw Lindbergh fly over Alva, Oklahoma, one night on his way from San Diego to New York to make that trip across the Atlantic Ocean, some of us had radios at that time, it was rather new, and everybody was listening to the radio at night and people were turning their house lights off and going out into the yard to listen for Lindbergh to come over. At about 10:30 he came over at night. He was following the airwaves and we all got a thrill out of it. Since that time I always wanted to be a pilot particularly a fighter pilot. The only thing I was ever interested in. So that's how I happened to join the Marine Corps before I went into my senior year and I didn't get what I thought I was going to get because I couldn't join the Air Force because I wasn't eighteen yet. Being seventeen two Marine recruiting Sergeants says, "Son you came to the right place. If you want to get a

chance to get into flight training, we're your only choice." So I signed up and instead of getting flight training, they put a BAR on my shoulder and marched me across the South Pacific. I went in on the Fourth of July in 1942 before my senior year started. I made up for it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What is your birth date?

Mr. Roush:

11th of October, 1924. I made up for it because I now have a PhD in biblical archeology. So you may call me Dr. Roush. Don't ask about your aches and pains, I have enough of my own.

Mr. Misenhimer:

July 4, 1942 you went into the Marines.

Mr. Roush:

July 1942.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You picked the Marines because they wouldn't let you at that age join the Air Force.

Mr. Roush:

Because they promised at that age I could apply for flight training. Fat chance.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go in at?

Mr. Roush:

A Marine Corps base in San Diego.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you take your boot camp?

Mr. Roush:

At Marine Corps base in San Diego.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was that boot camp?

Mr. Roush:

Oh, God. Horrible. The first thing we heard when the bus came through the gate that morning was “You’ll be sorry.” And we never forgot it. I’ll tell you, if you survived I’ll say one thing: they completely restarted us. We came out of there different people than we were before. We thought our drill sergeant was the meanest man on earth. He was cruel, he was brutal, he was unforgiving and he really was. But you know on the last day when we graduated, we saw a human side of him. He became a different person and he was talking to some of us and they were laughing and joking about some of the things that had happened. All of a sudden we realized why he had been so tough on us. I’m glad he was because I think because what he drilled into us saved some of our lives.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Good, right. I understand they tear you down and build you back up.

Mr. Roush:

They certainly did.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now where did you go when you finished boot camp?

Mr. Roush:

Went to Camp Elliott. That was while Camp Pendleton was still being built. Wasn’t open yet.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you do at Camp Elliott?

Mr. Roush:

Well, they put us into combat companies. It's really interesting. We went into the 6th Regiment because the 6th Regiment had just got back from Iceland. They'd been stationed over there as sort of defense against the Germans invading some of the islands over there. So by that time the Navy you know was little more active and so that danger wasn't there like it had been so they sent them to Camp Elliott and we joined them and they were a good group for us to start with because some of the other people who came out of boot camp they were all recruits but we had some very good veterans in our group. Some of them had been in the banana wars in South America and Central America. I know our Sergeant had been in the Marine Corps for something like fifteen years and he was very helpful. We got the advantage of some excellent training when we got to Camp Elliott.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What kind of weapons training did you have?

Mr. Roush:

Well, just as soon as you got assigned they took the biggest man in each company. I know it's always the little guys that claim "Well, I was the littlest guy so I got the BAR." That was the exception if that ever happened. They would always take the biggest man in the squad and make him the BAR man. I happened to be the biggest man in our twelve-man squad so I wound up with the Browning Automatic Rifle and I carried that for the rest of the time I was in the Marine Corps until I came home two years later.

Mr. Misenhimer:

But you trained in other weapons besides that, right?

Mr. Roush:

Oh, yes, while we were in boot camp we went to Camp Matthews which is a little north of San Diego and we spent I think about two weeks, maybe three, in target practice with rifles. At that time it was the Springfield. We didn't have the M1 yet.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Right, the bolt action.

Mr. Roush:

The old bolt action. So we qualified finally at the rifle range and I ended up being a sharpshooter.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Had you grown up shooting a rifle?

Mr. Roush:

I had an advantage over most of the rest of them because when we were in boot camp at the base I was surprised at the number of guys who had never even fired a gun before. I can't remember the first time I fired a gun because I had spent part of my young life on a ranch and I remember my dad helping me hold up a .22 rifle so that I could hold it on target to shoot. I was probably about three years old maybe. So I was very used to shooting and also hunting. Now I also did quite a bit of hunting when I was younger and I had the instincts, it gave me the instincts of a hunter and I think that was a big advantage. A .22 rifle by the back door next to the broom was customary.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then when you finished there where did you go?

Mr. Roush:

From Camp Elliott we were there a little more than two and a half months and in October of 1942 they shipped out the whole group to Wellington, New Zealand.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you in a division at this point?

Mr. Roush:

Yes. We were pretty much division strength by that time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

This is the 2nd Division.

Mr. Roush:

The 2nd Division, yes. We went to Pakakariki, Camp Pakakariki, which is about thirty miles out from Wellington and we were there for about two months. It's mentioned in my book "Open Fire" and there's a map of it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was that trip down to New Zealand?

Mr. Roush:

Rough. Lot of us were seasick. There was so many troops on this one little boat that they didn't have...they weren't able to furnish us three meals a day. So only two meals a day. At the start of reveille a chow line would start and we were assigned by groups to get in this line and to go down below to the mess hall and if you missed the time that your company was assigned to get in line, you'd have to go to the end of the line. By the time the line was over they would start another line then for the evening meal. So there was a continuous from sunrise to sunset there was a continuous chow line to go down and get fed.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you in a convoy going down there?

Mr. Roush:

Yes. Probably about four or five troop ships along with a few destroyers and some destroyer escorts but there were no cruisers or battleships with us.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any submarine alerts?

Mr. Roush:

We had several submarine alerts but I guess it turned out they weren't submarines, they were whales.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How about Japanese aircraft?

Mr. Roush:

Nope. To my knowledge we were never attacked at any point along our destination, going or coming.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you got to New Zealand, what all did you do there?

Mr. Roush:

It was more of combat training, long hikes, overnight hikes, setting up positions, digging in and then another company would come toward us in a simulated combat. It was rather realistic.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I understand that the stevedores were on strike down there, you had to do some work like that or not?

Mr. Roush:

Oh, yeah, I remember that. It didn't happen with our group but I think one of the groups previous that's true. They had to build and set up their own camps. There were three or four, maybe five, different setups down there, installations, and that did happen, that's true. I forgot about that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I understand that the 1st Marine Division really had to do that. I'm not sure about the others.

Mr. Roush:

Yes, they were up at Auckland. I don't know of it happening there at Wellington. I must say one thing about the New Zealanders, we thought they were some of the greatest people on earth because they welcomed us like lost children. Up til that time, they had their minds pretty much set that the Japanese were going to invade New Zealand and they had made preparations, they had set up roadblocks, they had some of the road tunnels set with explosives to blow them and they were really expecting the Japanese. When convoys of Marines showed up, our Marines were----- They couldn't have been happier. They just treated us wonderful. Wonderful, wonderful people, never forget them. Let me add that the New Zealanders were very, very upset with England taking their soldiers to the Libyan desert to fight the Germans there. The New Zealanders and the Australians didn't see it that way. They thought they should have left a sizable amount of their military there to defend them against the Japanese because the Japanese were coming their way and had all intentions of invading them. If it hadn't been for the American military, particularly the Marines, as well as the Navy, I give the Navy a lot of credit, they just did an exceptional job early in the war. Just couldn't believe how good they were. So they were very upset with the English and the way the war was being fought, just left them defenseless they thought, sacrificing them as a matter of fact.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Roush:

After about two months in Wellington we boarded four or five ships and headed for Guadalcanal. We landed there on the Fourth of January 1943, six months to the morning that I'd been in the Marine Corps. We took over basically, the 2nd Marine Division took over the rest of the action on Guadalcanal. Not to cast aspersions, but when we got almost within sight of the north end of the island, they relieved us and brought the Army up and they secured the island. We didn't understand at the time because we highly resented it but it's not the mission of the Marine Corps to take an island. It's changed a little bit now but at that time the only, the official duty of the Marine Corps is to make a beachhead and set up a defense and then the Army is supposed to take over and that's the way it happened. Didn't understand that until later because we sort of resented the Army taking credit for securing the island.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get into much combat on Guadalcanal?

Mr. Roush:

Yes, I was on the front line all the time that we were there. I must say to credit myself, I was always on the front line. I never once left my post, I never once went back to the corpsman or to sick bay. If I had some problems, some cuts or scratches or whatever, I waited for the corpsman to come to my foxhole. That's a little more than I can say for some of the rest of the guys. But living conditions on Guadalcanal were the most deplorable that you could imagine. Just living there for about two months was enough to put everybody on the sick list. About two months was about it. When we landed on that morning there were some members of the 8th Regiment and the

2nd Regiment of the 2nd Marine Division that had already been there. By the way that's sort of been left out of the history. 1st Marine Division has got credit mainly for Guadalcanal. But the 2nd Marine Division was also there entirely, not all at once, but regiment by regiment and was in on some of the first of the fighting. As a matter of fact I mention in my book that the very first shots fired in the Guadalcanal invasion was by some members of the 2nd Regiment I believe as they approached Tanga-bogo which is across the Iron Bottom Sound over there at Tulagi. So they fired the first shots of the invasion of Guadalcanal.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, the 2nd Marines did most of the fighting in the Tulagi area.

Mr. Roush:

Yes, they did. But anyway getting back to my point, what was my point? At my age this sort of thing happens.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What battles were you in there on Guadalcanal?

Mr. Roush:

The battle of Tenaru River which was a repeat battle. It had been fought, that was north of Henderson Field and that sort of seemed to be a pretty good sized river. Sort of seemed to be the dividing line between the Japanese and the Americans for the last say maybe four months. The Japanese were landing to the north of it and had most of their installations there and every time they would come across the Tenaru River then they'd be pushed back. So when we got there we only had the island secured up to that river. If you went beyond it, it was sort of like no man's land. Well, we crossed over the river and went on to within sight of the end of the island. We lost about six people killed. I don't know how many more were wounded. It wasn't the battle

conditions as much as it was the living conditions. We sort of learned what the Japanese were like. They were tough but it was almost like fighting a ghost, fighting somebody who was like invisible. I don't know that I ever saw a live Japanese on Guadalcanal. Usually they were killed at night as they were trying to infiltrate our lines or once in a while there would be a little Banzai charge and you'd just fire into the darkness and the next morning you'd find the bodies. That's sort of strange, isn't it?

Mr. Misenhimer:

There was a battle called Sea Horse Ridge up there I think somewhere.

Mr. Roush:

Yes there was. I think that was a little higher elevation. We were usually either right along the beach or not too far from it, maybe a mile inland. I remember one time we were at the extreme left flank as we were moving northward and we were only about a mile inland. Now the Japanese didn't, people wondered why didn't they outflank us. No, it was too rough out there. They avoided it but not only that, those natives with those machetes, some of them were still cannibalistic. They never denied it. As a matter of fact I have a picture somewhere of one of the natives holding two Japanese heads, along with a machete because the Japanese missed quite a few sentries that were posted at night by themselves and come there the next morning they wouldn't find them or else they'd just find the body and no head. So they were fearful of the natives and were protecting themselves from them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes, they were headhunters, right.

Mr. Roush:

They were headhunters, yeah, and they did not like the Japanese at all. They were a considerable

amount of assistance to us against the Japanese because they were always bringing us information on what was going on with the Japanese. Just being there was tough. Let me make this comparison. I never got wounded on Guadalcanal, I got scratched up several times by some ricocheting shrapnel. You might say we didn't see that much action but I did on Tarawa. I did on Saipan and I did on Tinian where the fighting for our group was much, much worse. I mean we really got into some real typical battlefield action. I would rather take my chances on going through any of those than going back to Guadalcanal, mainly because of conditions, living conditions. When we landed there on Guadalcanal the guys that were taking the ships out, like there was the 2nd Regiment and the 8th Regiment, felt so sorry for those guys, they were like walking skeletons. You'd look at them and they'd sort of look at you like maybe they saw you and maybe they didn't. They were just on the verge of collapse. They were skin and bones. Some of them could hardly walk and I was thinking, "Good Lord is that going to happen to us?" Well, it did. We were trying to engage some of them into a little conversation, asking "What's it like here? What's it like here?" They wouldn't say much except one guy said something. "Well, let me tell you what it's like," he said, "You see that nut hole there in that rut that the Jeep just went through, splashing muddy water around? Before you leave here, you'll be drinking water like that." I remember some of our squad, we were looking at each other and thinking, "Come on, who's going to believe that?" But in eight days I was drinking water almost as bad. It was so bad I had to strain it through my teeth because we were short on water all the time. We were perspiring all the time and we'd lose, I must have lost about thirty pounds while I was on the island.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The 1st Marine Division was there about four and a half months. They really had it rough there.

Mr. Roush:

They really had it rough and I really admire those guys for the suffering that they did. No necessarily in combat but for the living conditions. Of course the combat was bad enough. When you add that to the living conditions. I'd rather go through any of the other three but we suffered a lot of casualties in going through Guadalcanal. Oh, by the way, it sort of left me with a permanent scar. Not from wounds but I learned after Guadalcanal and Tarawa and Saipan and Tinian if you went to sleep at night you might not wake up. So I have insomnia for the rest of my life and I have been taking sleeping pills every night for the last fifteen, twenty years.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then when did you leave Guadalcanal?

Mr. Roush:

We were there for, let's see, we left the latter part of February. We were there almost exactly two months.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now you left in February.

Mr. Roush:

Latter part of February. Went back to Pakakariki again in New Zealand.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I understand they declared Guadalcanal secured about February 24 or something like that.

Mr. Roush:

Something like that, yeah. We were there another ten days before we could clear out. Little humorous story: We went through Guadalcanal with Springfields and everybody supposedly that was your weapon and you were responsible for it. By the time we left they must have taken at

least 25 or 30 M-1s away from us and given them back to the Army. They were a much better weapon than the Springfield. What the Marines called “moonlight requisition.” I just wondered how many of Army guys or Navy guys or who knows what woke up with a Springfield in the rack instead of an M-1 where he’d left it. Also we’d picked up a few tommyguns. Tommyguns were not issued to us at that time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You had your BAR, right?

Mr. Roush:

Yes. I had that BAR. I wouldn’t have traded that for anything. It was a marvelous weapon. It saved my life more than once. Ambushed several times and in some of the Banzai charges.

Sometimes I was practically by myself and that’s also in my book. That happened on Saipan. On Guadalcanal there wasn’t that much personal action like I say. Of course we’d shoot at night and throw grenades at night and in the morning we’d go out and find the bodies.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then you went back to New Zealand.

Mr. Roush:

Back to News Zealand. Beautiful country. We were only scheduled basically as I understand, we were only scheduled to be there for about two months and then we were supposed to go to Bougainville but we suffered one hundred percent from malaria. Serious cases of malaria. Matter of fact we had some guys start dropping out on Guadalcanal and I think we had three guys in our company that died and was buried there at New Zealand. It just really physically wrecked our regiment. Of course not only our regiment but the 2nd Marines were doing the same thing. So instead of being there for about two months, we were there for close to six months before we

could recover our strength to be a fighting division again. I don't know how many guys actually got a medical discharge in our group but there were probably I'd say a good twenty-five percent or thirty percent that were sent back to the States for hospitalization. Had to have replacements. Then we had to train the replacements before we could go into combat. So we missed Bougainville so the next thing that came up was Tarawa.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Bougainville was November 1 of 1943 when that started and Tarawa was November 20, right.

Mr. Roush:

Twentieth or twenty-fourth, yeah, whatever it was.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about going to Tarawa.

Mr. Roush:

Spent quite a time afloat before we got there. We went by way of, what's that big island part way in the middle?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well, there's New Caledonia.

Mr. Roush:

New Caledonia. We went into New Caledonia harbor and we spent about ten days or two weeks there while the rest of the convoy was assembling. We also made a couple of practice maneuvers. You know while I think about Tarawa, let me throw out a good story. We spent a good week at anchor in a little inlet just off of Noumea. The ship anchored there like I say for about a week and there was absolutely nothing for us to do. We were not participating in any landings and it was about the only full week of relaxation with nothing to do, there wasn't that

many people on board the ship and we went fishing over the side. We conversed, had a ship's PA system and they played music for us and you could look over on New Caledonia which was actually sort of a pretty place and would you believe they had herds of wild horses on New Caledonia. Yeah, and some of them were pretty, they were spotted. So we had nothing to do but sit there and relax and eat food and go fishing and watch horses roaming around New Caledonia. It was so quiet and peaceful and the water was so blue and we could look down into it. It was the only time I can think of in the whole four years in the Marine Corps where we did nothing, just relaxing and enjoying ourselves. But that was just before we landed on Tarawa.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about the landing there.

Mr. Roush:

Fortunately I didn't land until the second day. If I had landed the first day I probably wouldn't be here. Tarawa was like nothing else in the war. It was up front and personal. If you shot somebody you could probably hit him with a rock also. So it was, it was not like Guadalcanal where you know, half the time you didn't know who you were shooting at. We saw plenty of the Japanese. Like I say, it was up front and personal. Eyeball to eyeball is a good way of stating it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

It's a very small island compared to Guadalcanal.

Mr. Roush:

Oh, yes, yes. It was what, half a square mile in size or something like that?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, I'm not sure. It was very small.

Mr. Roush:

It was very small and when you consider that there was about 4,000 Imperial Japanese Marines there, along with probably a thousand Korean laborers with about 4,000 Marines. There was hardly room to turn around without bumping either into a Marine or a Japanese. I'm glad that I didn't come home after Tarawa. The reason is, it's like a pilot if he has a crash. They put him right back in a cockpit as soon as they can. Because if they don't, he'll always have bad memories of that crash. Of course some of the guys did come home right after Tarawa because of the nature of their wounds but by the time most of us had gone through two more campaigns, it had sort of desensitized us. But Tarawa was brutal. It was right in your lap. It wasn't at a distance. Very few of the Japanese were killed with mortars, a lot with grenades, yes, and none with artillery fire. It was like hand to hand, bullets and grenades. Made it very personal. I don't know how the first wave got off the beach except that I believe Colonel Crow was given credit for saying something like, "Come on you son of a bitches if you stay here, you'll all get killed so we might as well get as many of them as we can." I talked to quite a few of the guys that were there in that first day and they all said we didn't think we were going to make it. We came in here with the hopes that like they told us that we were going to pick up the pieces. Well, that didn't happen and they were restricted to the beach until late in the first day or the morning the second day, mainly before we got there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

One of the big problems was even getting to the beach.

Mr. Roush:

Getting to the beach, that's true.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Because there was that reef out there that stopped the landing craft.

Mr. Roush:

Nothing like Tarawa before or since. It sort of broke the rules. So they all thought they were going to get killed so they might as well take as many Japanese with them as they could. I talked to some of the guys and said, "What happened when you jumped off the beach and charged across?" Outside of saying, "Well, we thought we were going to get killed anyway." They went across the island and then they turned around and came back and then they turned around and came back. One sweep across an area did not guarantee that you didn't leave a lot of Japanese behind because the Japanese were mostly underground all the time. Then as you'd go by, they'd come out and fire at you as you were passing on. It was, you just can't imagine how it was. It was unrealistic. You'd take an area and think it was secure and you'd go to the next little position and all a sudden there's Japanese behind you. It was just a back and forth battle, back and forth battle. But when our group got onto the island, we were on the west end on Green Beach which was not a beach that was mainly defended. As we were stuck there on the beach waiting for something, somebody to say take this area next to you or whatever, the beaches were piling up with wounded men and casualties, dead guys. The medics were overwhelmed, the medics and the doctors. What gets me to this day is that there so many guys that were in such bad shape that many of them were marked dead and they were still alive because the doctors didn't think they had enough time to spend to save one guy when if there were a couple of other guys they could save in less time. That bothers me to this day. While that was going on a battalion, I think they were Marine Raiders, I've forgot now who they were, but they came in rubber boats and had left their boats there, right there in our area while they started going inland.

So here's all these guys laying here and these rubber boats. Well, I just happened to be the first one to put two and two together and I said to my Sergeant, "Hey, listen. Why don't some of us put these guys in these rubber boats and take them out beyond the reef to the Higgins boats so they can get them to the hospital ship?" He says, "That's a good idea, Roush, why don't you do it?" He says, "Get some volunteers to help you." We loaded about four guys on stretchers that were lying there by these boats and started taking them out. There is one picture existing of this going on. I'm not in the picture and it didn't happen to be the boat that I was using but as soon as I started doing that, lots of other guys started doing that with the other rubber boats. So I spent all the rest of that day and all the rest of the night taking guys out beyond the reef so that they could get to the hospital ship. You know I got my share of Japanese during the war but the thing I'm proud of is more the guys that I helped save and there were some of them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now did these rubber boats have some kind of a propulsion system?

Mr. Roush:

No propulsion system.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You had to swim and push them?

Mr. Roush:

Well, didn't take paddles. We just swam. Our bodies were in the water all the time and we were just swimming and pushing.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's what I say, just swim and push, right.

Mr. Roush:

Swim and push, yeah. There was one experience I'll never forget. There was one guy on one of those stretchers and must have been about one o'clock in the morning and we were out maybe close to half a mile from the island and it was getting quiet. Tarawa was about the noisiest place you can imagine. The Navy was still shelling part of it and dive bombers were still bombing and strafing part of it so it was pretty noisy. Well, there was this one guy, in fact he was an American Indian kid, and he would sort of lapse in and out of consciousness and when he would come to I guess he thought he was dead because it was quiet. And the boat was rocking a little bit and he would say "Hello, is anybody there? Hello. Hello." He said, "Anybody there, give me your hand." So I'd reach up and I'd give him my hand and I'd say, "Yes, buddy, I'm here." Pretty soon he'd pass out again and pretty soon he would come to consciousness again and do the same thing. Finally about the third time, he said, "What's your name?" and I told him and he said, "I don't know if I'm going to make it or not." But he said, "I just took two rolls of film off of a Japanese officer." And he says, "I don't know what's on them but maybe there's something there of military importance so I'm going to give them to you so you can take charge of them." So I did and managed to keep them dry. I was able to mail them, I couldn't find anybody at the time who was in a position to do anything with them except just put them in their pocket. I mailed them home to my dad and he developed them and those are in my book. Actually they were pictures taken by some of the Japanese officer who was probably a pilot because there was a couple of shots of a Zero and an aerial shot of Tarawa. So anyway those are in my book. I'm the only one that has those pictures. I have offered...in my book I said that if anybody in Japan recognizes any of these people, I'd be glad to send them the picture but I've never got a response back. So anyway the island was secured, most of the fighting was over. We were still getting

Japanese out of shelters and bunkers for I don't know, three or four or five months. As a matter of fact I think it was two or three years later they finally discovered a couple of Japanese that were living at the end of the pier, underneath the pier. We stayed there for another two or three months, our battalion, 2nd Battalion, stayed. Everybody else left, everybody. Everybody except the Seabees. The Seabees stayed there with some bulldozers and started building the airstrip. So we spread out at various locations throughout the island and set up bunkers, etc. for two months and then we went to Hawaii to train for Saipan.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you in Hawaii?

Mr. Roush:

The big island, far side of Hilo at a place called Kamuela, called Camp Tarawa.

Mr. Misenhimer:

They named it that after Tarawa.

Mr. Roush:

I found this in some of my boxes when I was doing my book, I found a military map of Camp Tarawa at that time which I published in my book. So if any historians want to know what the camp was like, when the 2nd Marine Division was there, there's a map of it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What all happened in Hawaii?

Mr. Roush:

It was pretty rough training. Most of us by that time were military veterans of combat. But we were getting replacements in and so we kind of reorganized and at that time they started forming the BAR groups which meant they found out how effective the BAR was on Guadalcanal and

Tarawa that they organized squads into units of three or four BAR squads so there would be like three or four BARs in each squad depending upon whether there were nine or ten people or twelve or thirteen people but a BAR group was made up of four people. It would be a group leader, a BAR man, an assistant BAR man, and one rifleman. That's what gave us the firepower that we needed on Saipan. If it hadn't been for the BARs it could have been a different story. But every fourth man had a BAR.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So then what happened?

Mr. Roush:

It was a real interesting training and very effective because we went on a number of what you call "live-firing" maneuvers, where we were firing you know not just pointing your rifle and saying real loud bang-bang. We were firing live ammunition. Of course we had a few casualties from it. It was rather dangerous. It was kind of realistic. Among other things they showed us how to fire a 37mm anti-tank gun and shells that were armor-piercing. They showed each one of us how to start and operate a General Sherman Tank. They showed us quite a few things that were more expensive than we'd had before. So after about two months or so we boarded ships for Saipan. I must say by that time I was beginning to get discouraged because I figured if the Japanese didn't get me, the bugs would. You know after Guadalcanal we all thought, "We're gonna go back to the States for Christmas." Well, it didn't happen. After Tarawa we were sure because that was near the end of the November when they thought they'd ship everybody, OK we're going to be home for Christmas. No, we didn't. So I was beginning to get the idea that I was expendable. At that time I really got discouraged because the chances of it happening were

about ninety-nine and a half percent. I was one of four guys that was still left in our original company that left Camp Elliott in October of 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Today is October 24, 2012. This is a continuation of the interview with Roy William Roush.

Mr. Roush:

We had left Hawaii as I recall on the 15th of May. On the 15th of May in 1944 and this huge convoy assembled off the west coast of Hawaii and lots of LSTs, I don't know how many.

Anyway let's take up there. You know my thoughts as we were heading out of Hawaii in the first time in two years, I was getting a little depressed. I was beginning to get the idea that I was expendable. In other words, they didn't intend to send us home like we thought they were because we had so many casualties with malaria after Guadalcanal out of over two hundred people, everyone of us got malaria except one Sergeant and the only reason that he didn't get malaria on Guadalcanal was because he was only there for a shorter time. Outside of him, every single one of us, you might say we had ninety-nine percent casualties from malaria and quite a few of these guys had been sent home, some of them even got a medical discharge because of the severity and reoccurring attacks of malaria, they were considered unfit for combat and were actually discharged, like we had three guys actually die from malaria. So we didn't go home for Christmas after Guadalcanal like we all had anticipated that they would send us home for recuperation. Then after Tarawa which was in November there again the talk was "Hey, we're going to go home for Christmas. See the Golden Gate, etc." But we were disappointed that didn't happen either. So now I'm getting the picture they were just going to keep us over there. I didn't know where we were going or what we were going to do but I knew that we were going deeper into Japanese territory and it would probably be, probably suffer more casualties than on Tarawa.

So I really got despondent. I wasn't giving up and I just to be truthful I didn't think I was ever going to get back to the States alive. So anyway, something most unusual happened that first night that is not talked about in the history books very much. As a matter of fact, about the only references that you will find on it is like in the 2nd Marine Division publications and a few other things and mentioned in my book. The weather was very fair, no clouds, it was a bright moonlit night and we went directly west out of Hawaii until about one o'clock in the morning when the whole convoy made a ninety degree right turn because we were going to go over to, I forget the name of the next Hawaiian island over, for maneuvers but there were huge ground swells, I mean ground swells about as big as you will ever see. And when we got ninety degrees to these ground swells it was disastrous. I think of the LCTs that were on top of the LSTs I think we lost about twelve of them that slid right off the top and went right in the water. We don't know how many people were drowned because the Navy never mentioned a word about it ever and never ever mentioned the casualties. But I know there must have been at least one hundred fifty people, Marines and sailors, that were drowned. It was about one o'clock in the morning. Our crew was sleeping in cots on the deck of the LST with the LCT above us and there was only maybe three and a half feet space for our cots and our bodies. As a matter of fact if you were sleeping on your back, if you weren't careful when you'd raise up you'd bump head on the bottom of the LCT above. Well, I had just gone to sleep and the ship started rolling side to side and my cot started sliding sideways actually and I looked down in the direction that the ship was rolling and the ship's railing was under water. Then it lurched back the other way. It did about four lurches and some of those, as a matter of fact the LCT on top slid about three feet before, it was chained down, before it hit the stop. The next day they had to realign it back to the center of the ship but something most unusual happened that never happened so far as I know any other time, the

whole convoy turned their lights on to rescue the men who were in the water. I don't know, we were active in trying to locate some of the guys that were out there in the water yelling. I think we picked up two or three at least but I do remember several times before we turned the lights on. It took a little while before we did that. I know we passed by some of the ships that were ahead of us in the convoy which lost some men off the side and you could hear them yelling for help. We had to bypass them. Anyway, eventually they turned their lights on, many of the ships, for about an hour and a half or more we were rescuing men. Now some of these LCTs that were on top were full of...they had a crew of about six people, sailors, and they were in their quarters and then they had the ramp open and some of them were sleeping on the deck of the LCT were perhaps fifteen or twenty Marines on cots. You can just imagine what happened when about as I say maybe about a dozen of those LCTs slid right into the water. Some of them went right on down. I don't know that we recovered any of the LCTs, lost a lot of the men that were on them and also the crew. It was a dumb thing to have happened in the first place. You would have thought that with those ground swells we would not want to get sideways because the expected happened. I'm not emphasizing this because I am one of the very, very few that put that on record and it has been substantiated, after I put my book out, by a few people who wrote in to the 2nd Marine Division book to substantiate what I was saying. But you won't find many records of the U.S. Navy on it. Anyway we finally got under way and went on over to the next island, I guess it was Maui and we were there for three or four days, sort of licking our wounds, reorganizing and practicing maneuvers and then we took off then for Saipan. So I guess we were on board about two and a half weeks or so on our way to Saipan. OK, now what else, where else do you want me to pick up?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well, go ahead, you're going to Saipan, keep going.

Mr. Roush:

All right. So after surviving this disaster right off the coast of Hawaii, we finally got reorganized, regrouped and a huge, huge convoy headed out for who knows, we didn't know where at the time. I think it was only maybe two days before we landed on Saipan that we were told where we were going and sort of half-way what to expect. We were told that it would be a lot different than Guadalcanal, a lot different than Tarawa. It was a fairly civilized island about twenty miles long or so and three or four miles wide with a big native population. Saipan had a modern city, had electric lights, had sewers, it had a fire department, it had a police department, had a radio station, had a lighthouse. So just again it was a completely different type of fighting for us, for the first time the 2nd Marine Division was going to be involved in more or less street fighting as well as trying to fight the Japanese from inside bunkers etc. The day before we landed, we had a company formation on board the LCT. I remember our company commander, a very nice guy, Captain got a little sentimental and he went through our formation, shook hands with every man and talked to him for a moment. Took forty-five minutes or so at least. He wished everyone of us the best of luck and said, "Unfortunately I know by this time tomorrow, some of you won't be here." I guess that was rather unusual. We all liked him. We never forgot him. Incidentally, he got hit after we landed, I think about fifteen minutes after we landed he got hit. We evacuated I don't recall if he died or not. But anyway it was very impressive formation. The morning we landed it so happened that our group which at that time was F Company, I had been transferred just before we left Hawaii, F Company, I was in 3rd Platoon, 3rd Squad and they had divided us into BAR squads by that time. In other words, they found that the BARs had been so effective on

Tarawa that they decided to make BAR teams out of every squad. Supposedly each squad of about sixteen men there would be four BAR squads. Every fourth man would have a BAR. Then of course he would also have an assistant. Then there would be the group leader and then there would be a scout sniper. So four men would comprise a complete fire team. Of course under the control of their squad leader under the control of their platoon leader. Very, very effective. It was a very smart troop move by the Marine Corps to do that, to have every fourth man with a BAR. It took about maybe an hour and a half and we were laying off the shore of Red Beach One and Two and Three, etc. to get the Amtracks and the Higgins boats into the water with their personnel. It was really something to watch. I remember I was up on the prow of an LST watching the operation and I described in my book that the LST next to us that was unloading amphibious tractors with men in them. There were some pretty big ground swells and the amphibious tractor would go out to the end of the ramp just ready to jump in the water but the timing had to be just right. We were like ninety degrees on the ground swells. The ground swells were coming from behind the ships. The ground swells we were at a ninety degree angle with them and these amphibious tractors at the end of the ramp had to jump in the water at the right time when the swell was at its height at the end of the ramp. So believe it or not, I saw what happened at least one time when the amphibious tractor whoever told the driver to go, he was a little late and they went off the ramp and dropped about twelve feet. It went right under, all hands. It didn't come to the top and that was really scary to watch. I was just hoping that when we went in, because we were getting ready to load on an amphibious tractor, I was just hoping that our driver, that his timing was right to hit the ground swell when it was high and not when it was in the trough. Our group, F Company, landed at the extreme left of the whole operation. In other words, at the far left end of Red Beach One. We landed probably two or three hundred

yards beyond and to the left of Garapan. The reason was that when the first wave got into position and started toward the beach, they were too compact and naturally everybody started spreading out a little bit so that when the first wave hit the beach, it was considerably wider than it was supposed to be so the guys at the end, we landed probably two or three hundred yards to the left of the end of Red Beach One and it was still being shelled by particularly the U.S.S. California. I found out later which ship it was and we took some casualties. As a matter of fact there was a friend of mine that I'd gone to school with at Enid, Oklahoma. I won't mention his name, his first name was Clifford. He was in my group and I think he was in the same amphibious tank that I was in and when we hit the beach of course we ran inland a little bit but not very far and he was right at the base... He took cover behind a big tree. Well, a big hunk, I guess it was a twelve or fourteen inch shell from the California struck the tree above him and a piece of shrapnel that was about two and a half or three feet long, I saw it later, fell and hit the tree and came down on his head, punctured his helmet and gave him a concussion. He did survive and I did see him later after I got out of the Marine Corps and I did visit him but he wasn't sure who I was. He was not the same person. That was typically happened with some of the casualties that we took from our own shell fire before they could get word out to the ships that were still shelling to the left of that Red Beach One. They needed to stop shelling because we were there. It must have taken a good fifteen minutes or so before they discontinued shelling that beach. Well, that gave a little chance then to go inland a little bit, you know like a hundred yards or so, and go into a defensive position. After the shelling let up I tell you it gave a little chance to go inland and half-way join our group and set up our defensive position, we were attacked by three Japanese tanks, came right down the road from Garapan and we were the first group that they ran into. The lead Japanese tank came right into the middle of our company area.

I witnessed something that was right out of an Audie Murphy movie. My group leader of the group of four of us by the name of Cunningham. He and a few of the other guys, I didn't happen to be in the hole, I was in the big shell hole next to them, about twenty feet away, and the Japanese tank came right up to it before I guess the Japanese discovered that some of our group was in it and was going to fire directly, point blank range, but it couldn't lower its gun low enough to shoot into the hole. So it started to back off and Cunningham, my group leader, each of the group leaders were equipped with an anti-tank grenade. It was a little thing, about the size of a fountain pen, that you could bolt onto the end of your rifle and then fire a blank and it would project an anti-tank missile for maybe fifty feet or more. The tank was so close you could practically spit on it. Anyway he hit the tank in the tread and that crippled the tank and I guess the Japanese realized that they weren't going to get out of there. They did try to back out but they just started to spin and then Cunningham put another anti-tank grenade on the end of his rifle and hit the tank again and this time he hit it right in the crack of the turret. Japanese tanks was what we considered just junk. They were no where near the type of tank that our Shermans were or even the M5 light tanks we had before that. Their metal was not very thick, etc. It easily penetrated that tank and exploded on the inside. I guess there was maybe three or four Japanese inside and they opened the turret and started to come out but Cunningham leaped up on top of the tank and threw a grenade inside. So he personally knocked out a tank and the crew. For that he received a Silver Star. So things were pretty exciting. The other two tanks on seeing this one destroyed and they were also beginning to be attacked by our aircraft, retreated and went back toward Garapan Well, that happened about thirty to forty-five minutes after we had landed. You know the next day I was trying to recall where the hours went that morning but it just seemed like the morning, instead of having like four or five or six hours, was only about two hours in

length. There was so much going on that I just couldn't... And I was asking one of my friends, "What happened there between the time we landed and noon outside of the fact that Cunningham had knocked the tank out?" It just seemed like time flew. But anyway, also just before the tank came in, immediately when we hit the beach there was a large barrage of mortars. The concentration of them hitting our area and I thought probably it killed most of the rest of the guys in my company. I had started to follow Cunningham as he went first above the sandy beach and just about the time he hit his hole, that's when this huge mortar barrage hit. It was just everywhere, you couldn't see more than fifteen or twenty feet from all the dust that was going up. I thought to myself, "My God, everybody's killed." I stayed where I was until the mortar barrage was over. It lasted maybe fifteen or twenty minutes and then that's when I went forward to witness what Cunningham did with the tank attack. The rest of the day I just can't remember except that we were under fire all day. Once in a while some of the Japanese that had sort of been caught in the areas where we landed would jump out of hiding and make a run for it. I don't think any of them made it. That's how the rest of the day went. What else can I tell you? If I told you the story of Saipan we'd all be here until this time next week.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's fine. Keep going. I've got plenty of tapes.

Mr. Roush:

Well, after the first hour or so, things quieted down like I say. Some of the Japanese that were caught in the area where we had landed tried to come out of hiding and make a run for it. I don't think any of them made it. Anyway, later in the day we were able to carefully reorganize our lines. Would you believe our four man squad and the rest of our platoon, the 3rd Platoon, about sixteen men, we were assigned to the very extreme left end of the whole operation. For a while

there was nobody to my left except Japanese and the water of the beach. Everybody in the whole operation and all the other divisions were stretched out to my right, toward the other end of the island. It was a very uncomfortable position to be in. The beach area was probably 15, 25 maybe 30 feet wide. Then there was solid land and there was also a Japanese road, pretty decent graded road, that went from Garapan to our left about, which was maybe two miles away to Charan Kanoa which was the other town which was to our right. This was the connecting road and so there we were, right there on the connecting road between the two areas. We didn't get much sleep that night because the Japanese kept coming down toward us from Charan Kanoa and all during the night the trucks just out of range of rifle fire, and we could hear them. We could hear the trucks drive in close enough that we could hear the trucks coming. We could hear where they stopped. We could hear them turn the motors off and we could hear the Japanese jumping out and banging their mess gear etc. All night long this went on. Then about one o'clock in the morning they decided to do their first Banzai charge. Don't know how many there was but probably at least two hundred and they came right down the road toward our position. Our machine gunners did a great job. We had a lot of machine guns concentrated along the road because we knew that's where they would be coming from. Our machine guns were busy all night long. The second attack was about the same number, what they were doing was when the trucks, they didn't have all that many trucks available and when they would get enough to where they could perform a Banzai charge here they would come. Well, right in the middle of the second charge our Navy fired a star shell and the Japanese were caught out in the open. They had not thought about star shells that could light up the whole area for miles around as bright as sunlight. They were slaughtered, not one of them got through. About 35 minutes later or so, they tried another one. And again the Navy was notified as we had pretty good communications, not

like Tarawa where we had virtually no communication, we did have good communication between the landing people on the beachhead and the Navy. So they shot up another star shell and the rest of the night, periodically maybe every ten minutes or so, they would shoot up a star shell. The Japanese only tried maybe three attacks that night before they gave it up, realizing “Hey, the Navy is turning night into day so Banzai attacks don’t work like they did on Guadalcanal and Tarawa.” For myself I had gotten very little sleep the night before the landing, absolutely no rest or sleep or anything like that all during the daylight on the first day. Nighttime that first night, here again, no rest, no sleep. Finally about maybe three o’clock in the morning, we were like zombies. I got a little break because right there in the middle of our little platoon area, there was a Japanese machine gun nest that instead of firing out toward the water, it was situated so that it fired down the beach, parallel and the entrance to it was at the opposite side of course and our little group had been stationed right in front of the opening where the machine gun at one time had been to fire down the beach at us. But the Japanese had evacuated it and they had not tried to reoccupy the machine gun nest because we were like sitting on top of it. So finally about three o’clock in the morning I was just like a zombie and there were still mortar shells coming in, periodic firing, etc., and the thought occurred to me you know the Japanese could have come back and reoccupied that machine gun nest and if so, it would have been point blank onto what was left of our group. So I said to my Sergeant, I said, “Why don’t I go into this emplacement with my BAR and I will keep any Japanese from slipping into it to reoccupy it.” He said, “Good idea, go ahead.” So I did, I went inside and placed my automatic rifle so it covered the entrance in case any Japanese tried to come in. Well, it gave me about an hour and a half of rest where I didn’t have to worry about mortar shells coming in or artillery shell or something like that and I did recuperate to some extent which gave me an advantage at daylight

when we had a big Banzai charge. How can you describe a Banzai charge with about sixteen hundred Japanese coming down the beach all at once. It was wild. They came right down the road into the middle of our platoon area. It was starting to get daylight and you knew the Japanese were getting ready to make another large Banzai charge. I came out of this machine gun emplacement and said to my Sergeant, "We need some replacements, we need," you know, there was only about half of our group that was left. I said "We can't hold off a Banzai charge." He says, "Yeah that's right. We need some help but there aren't any." I said, "Well, how about the tanks?" He says, "There aren't any tanks." I said, "Yes there are." He said, "How do you know?" I said, "Because just as it got dark last night I saw about a dozen of our tanks being unloaded down the beach there about a mile." I said, "Why don't we call them up?" He said, "Well we don't have any communication." I said, "Well why don't I go and run down and tell them to bring them up?" He says, "go ahead." So I gave my BAR to my assistant and took his rifle and I started running down along the beach, along the water's edge and I had no sooner gone maybe 150 feet when I heard a bugle. I thought by God it must be St. Peter blowing his bugle for us. But would you believe and it's in some of the history books, a Japanese exposed himself, jumped out in front and played "Charge" on a bugle. Everybody was astonished. Guys poked their heads up out of their foxholes. Never in our life had we seen anything like that, before or after. He played it all through once and I turned around and was staring at him and I was no more than maybe 150 feet from him and he started to play it again and somebody shot him and the battle was on. By noon of that day, the Associated Press reporter said there were 1600 bodies directly in front of our company area along the road. So it gives you an idea sort of what happened. I ran down the beach, found the tanks and I was pretty excited and I was trying to tell them what was going on and these guys were sitting there like they were on a training

maneuver somewhere. They were drinking coffee etc because they were far enough away, they didn't know what was going on. You couldn't see but bullets were flying everywhere but then of course that had been going on, nothing unusual about that. Well, before we left Hawaii they had given every man instruction on how to shoot a 37mm anti-tank gun and they had shown everyone of us on how to drive a Sherman tank if necessary. I knew what was going on on our front line and I was trying to get these guys to do something. They just said, "OK, well..." So I jumped up on one tank and I opened the hatch and I was getting inside and I was going to close the hatch. I was going to drive the tank myself. It was desperate. The Japanese had broken through at that point and if you look at some of the old maps of the first day in Saipan you'll see how thin our lines were. We were not more than maybe a hundred or two hundred yards inland from the waterfront. If they had broken through along that road, then they would have got behind the whole operation. They had to be stopped at that point. Anyway I'm starting to close the hatch and this tank driver "Wait a minute man, wait a minute Mac, that's my tank." I said, "Yes, I know and I'm taking it." He says, "No, no. What's going on?" I tried to tell him, "The Japs are breaking through, the Japs are breaking through." And he says, "Well, we're OK hold on just a minute. I'll go with you." So it took two or three minutes but finally he got his crew together. They dumped their coffee, they jumped in the tank and he said, "Where?" I said, "Just follow this road where I came from." He said "All right, just a minute." He instructed another tank I guess in his group so two tanks with me and I was in the lead tank started down the road. Now there is a story that was written up by Jack Pepper and I think it was in one of the newspapers. The story is in my book "The morning of the second day. The tanks are coming, the tanks are coming but whose tanks are they?" Are they Japanese or American or what. He said, "Well, thank God as they got closer they turned about to see American tanks." Well, anyway I was just

below the tank commander who had the hatch opened and had his head and shoulders out and directing the tank driver, going down the road and we got about within 100 yards of where our position was and he got excited and he started closing the hatch. I said, "What's going on?" He says, "There's Japs out there, there's Japs out there." I said, "Yes, dammit that's what I've been trying to tell you all this time." So anyway he started to batten down the hatch and I said, "Wait a minute." I wanted out. I had seen what had happened to General Sherman tanks on Tarawa. On Tarawa I had seen three of them, as a matter of fact only about three that got ashore and all three had been knocked out and you do not want to be in a tank when it gets hit with an anti-tank missile or an anti-tank gun. It explodes inside and it burns. So anyway I'm trying to get out and he says, "You don't want out there, you don't want out there." So I jumped out of the tank against his advice. He says, "You'll be killed out there." I said, "I'm not going to be in a tank." Anyway, I jumped out and jumped into the ditch, there was a big shell hole there and there was a couple of other Marines in it. The tank lurched forward and went on up to maybe one hundred fifty yards up to right where my foxhole had been alongside the road, followed by the other tank. Obviously the two tanks stopped the Japanese from breaking through. As a matter of fact in about ten or fifteen minutes, the first tank that I was in came charging down the road and went back to their area, reloaded and came back and then the second tank did the same thing. It came charging down the road, went back to its area, reloaded and came back. The battle lasted I guess for an hour and a half. The Japanese kept coming from Garapan unloading the trucks and I could not quite see the actual shooting because there was an obstruction of trees, etc. but I could hear it. The Japanese were attacking the tanks with anti-tank magnetic mines. They did not succeed in knocking the tanks out but I heard they gave the guys a headache. I guess it scared them pretty bad. Anyway, finally there was no more Japanese coming and the tanks stayed in that area for a

little while. Not to give credit to myself, but I'll tell you what if the tanks hadn't have been there whether I personally called them up but whether or not they would have ever got up later on their own in time, I doubt it very much. Obviously the Japanese had to get rid of the tanks before they could charge on down the road and it was a slaughter like I say. They reported sixteen hundred Japanese bodies right there in front of our little platoon area after it was over with. Well, anyway, after things quieted down, I walked on up to my foxhole position and Cunningham was laying right there next to where my foxhole had been, the guy who had knocked the tank out, he was laying on his back on the beach, bleeding profusely and looked like he was dead. I said to my Sergeant who was sitting there slumped over, "Is that Cunningham?" because I hardly recognized him. He nodded and I said, "Is he alive?" and he shook his head. Later I found out that he didn't know if he was alive. So anyway I walked over and I touched him and I said, "Cunningham?" and he opened his eyes and looked up. Scared the hell out of me like I thought a dead man had come to life. He had been shot through the right side. He had been shot I guess it was the left side of his head, sort on the cheekbone below his eye and had gone out behind his ear. He lost total hearing in that ear later on I found out. Then he'd been shot near the bottom part of his neck that had gone into his body and then he had another bullethole near his heart and like I said he was bleeding all over the place. I opened my canteen of water and he grabbed it with both hands and started chugalugging it down. I knew that would make him sick so after he drank about half of it I had to take it away from him and he was begging for more. There wasn't any stretchers in the area so there was a little Japanese shack, maybe a hundred yards away, and I got one of the other guys around and we went over and tore off a door and we took Cunningham back to an aide station on this Japanese door. Well I thought that would be the last I ever saw of him but after I got rotated back to the States about six months later, I saw him in the chow line at

the Marine Corps depot there in San Diego in uniform in chow line. We had a little conversation and I said, "How're you doing?" and he says, "Well, I still can't hear anything out of this ear." But anyway he got a medical discharge, a Silver Star. What he had done while the tanks were up there or maybe just before they showed up, the 18th Engineers had brought a 37mm anti-tank gun up right beside my foxhole during the night and had been firing canister shots toward the Japanese. Well, the next morning when the Japanese were charging in force, the engineers had pulled the gun off of the road and had taken it right down onto the sandy beach where they could get a better field of fire towards the Japanese that were coming down from Garapan. Now they had a long field of fire but they also exposed themselves, being out on the beach and the entire team was knocked out, killed or wounded, and Cunningham here again, rose to the occasion, this is after he'd knocked the tank out, he was still active and he manned the gun by himself, got off any number of shots with it before the Japanese finally machine gunned him and put him out of action and that was when I found him, lying there behind the 37mm gun a little later. That was the morning of the second day. There was sporadic fighting for the rest of the day because there were still Japanese firing at us from inside of caves and gun emplacements all up and down Mount Tapochau. We was right at the foot of Mount Tapochau. So anyway you don't have enough tape to listen to all the things that I did for almost the next three weeks except that I was on my feet, got blown off my feet several times, got scratched by shrapnel several times, pretty close escapes. The day the island was secured, now this is something you also don't find in some of the documents. The purpose of the Marine Corps is to establish a beachhead. Then they bring the Army in and the Marines are supposed to leave. Well they tried that on Guadalcanal but the Army I guess they were trying to fight jungle warfare with the same type of, like they had done in World War I, where you shell a place, you shell a place, you soften it up and then you go

charging in but that didn't work in the jungle. The Japanese were still there and they were driven back. They were driven back two or three times. So the Marines were brought back to Guadalcanal to push our lines further toward the north and finally when we were within a very short distance of the end, they did bring us off the line which was 2nd Battalion, 6th Regiment, 2nd Marine Division. They did pull us off the line and we watched the Army come in with their trucks and their mules, with all their equipment. They certainly had the equipment, I have to give them credit, and then they pushed on to the end of the island and the Army officially secured Guadalcanal which is as it was supposed to be. Now Tarawa was a different situation. There wasn't room to pull the Marines out and to bring the Army in. That wouldn't work but it was supposed to work on Saipan. So after we had taken about ninety percent of the island, they pulled our group off of the front line down near to the suicide cliff, I can't remember the name of it right now, but anyway there was a location. They had pulled our battalion off of the line and put us up on top of the hill in an area that was already secured. They brought several battalions of Army in. These are all properly identified in the documents and they spread out from the beach toward the bottom of I guess it was Marpi Point where the suicide cliffs started. Anyway there was a little gap in the middle of their lines between one battalion and another battalion and that was just where the Japanese hit them in a crazy Banzai attack. They got behind their lines, both directions, and it was like every man for himself. We observed the battle. It broke out about one o'clock in the morning and we were only a couple of miles from it, sitting up on the ridge line and we could not imagine what was going on. We didn't think there were that many Japanese left on the island but I guess there must have been close to two thousand of them. They did one final, last bloody Banzai charge. They almost wiped out this Army group. I felt sorry for those guys and before daylight we were told to saddle up and we were going to go back in. We established

our line. Now the Japanese not only broke through their lines but proceeded some of them got as far back as a mile or more, going back into our territory. They were finally stopped by H Battery, 105 Howitzer Group. I know because that's where they put us on the line the next morning to start retaking the territory that the Japanese had taken during the night. I could see for myself what had happened. The group had four 105mm howitzers that had been active but you know a howitzer, an artillery group, is not supposed to fight off a ground attack at night but they did. But would you believe that the Japanese above them got into their lines and turned at least one of their howitzers ninety degrees sideways and they had a point-blank duel with the other two or three howitzers that were in the group. Now I saw this. I saw when we took over, not only myself but the rest of my group, we could see one of those 105 howitzers turned ninety degrees to the right, to the other howitzers and they had a point-blank duel. That had never happened up to that point. I don't know how much publicity was given to it but I know that there were a few pictures that came out and I do have a picture in my book and I think it's the one that shows that howitzer that was pointed ninety degrees. Now you talk about a hair-raising incident, a point-blank duel with 105 howitzers, I don't think so. Anyway their perimeter defense had stopped most of the Japanese and I guess with hand weapons they managed to shoot the Japanese that had taken over at least one of the 105s. Anyway, that's where we started that morning and we had to go back and re-take the rest of the island. So the Army did not secure Saipan. They were supposed to but they failed and the 2nd Battalion, 6th Regiment, 2nd Marine Division secured the island due to circumstances, most unusual. How I survived all that I don't know. I had a lot of close calls. I had a few bullets bounced off of me, I got scratched up with shrapnel several times but anyway I think my hour is up.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what else do we have to cover? Where did you go from there?

Mr. Roush:

Well, OK, let's see. What were the dates on that? We landed on Saipan on the 15th of June 1944. After we had secured the island I guess it was around the second or third of July, on the 29th of July we landed on Tinian. We were there from the 26th of July until the 9th of August. Then they sent us back to Saipan because believe it or not there were still two or three hundred Japanese running loose on Saipan. So until my time was up, like twenty-six months and something, which was like two and a half months over when I was supposed to have been returned, we spent our time trying to dig out these Japanese that were running loose around Saipan. Now it turned out that what we were looking for was a Japanese, there was a book written about him, "The Last Man Alive." I have the book. Anyway he had apparently taken command of the Japanese and had formed them into a group and they were united in attacking some of our areas, killing our sentries, taking food, etc. So we spent the rest of our time... Oba was his name... looking for Captain Oba. Then my time was up and I started back on the 9th of November to come back to the United States.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you doing the fighting on Tinian?

Mr. Roush:

Oh, yeah. In the first wave D-day. Same left flank and was there for the whole thing and then we stayed there I guess it was two or three weeks afterwards because we knew we didn't get all the Japanese. We were trying to round up strays. Went back to Saipan and licked the Japanese again.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now on Tinian, how was the fighting there compared to Saipan?

Mr. Roush:

Well, you know, there were quite a few Japanese there. They were pretty well established and they were dug in and God they had barracks and everything. They had a big airfield there. They were pretty well entrenched and it was sort of a repeat of Saipan except it wasn't as big and didn't last quite as long. But as far as the type of fighting was concerned, it was pretty much the same. They performed Banzai charges on us and it was pretty tough. I was reported injured on Tinian. It so happened that near the end of the island fighting we had another Roush that joined our company one day as a replacement. I didn't know about it until that afternoon and I heard some of the guys in my group talking, "Hey, we got another Roush in our group. What are we going to do now?" And I said, "Really, where is he?" They said, "He's over there in the other end of the company line." So I was going to go see who the guy was and introduce myself. But during the night there was a Banzai charge and he got shot. He was carried out and I never saw the guy but we had a First Sergeant that was a stumblebum and what did he do but turn in Roy Roush as the casualty. Sent a telegram to my parents and it was never corrected. I still have that telegram saying "Sorry to inform you that your son Roy William Roush was injured in the battle of, I don't know if they said Tinian or something." In a few weeks I started getting letters from people, my folks "How are you? Where are you now? What happened? Where did you get hit? Etc." I finally figured out what had happened and apparently the other Roush, his parents I don't know if they ever were informed but I was thinking what if he had been killed. That First Sergeant would have done the same thing, he would have sent a telegram to my parents "Sorry to inform you but your son Roy Roush was killed in action on Tinian." So that's how things can get

confused. Got another story. I think I said to begin with the main reason I volunteered to go into the Marine Corps at age seventeen just before my eighteenth birthday because they were going to draft kids right out of high school back in 1942. They were intending to draft everybody on their eighteenth birthday and it would be my last year in high school and I didn't want to end up in the Army as cannon fodder. I thought if I had a choice I wanted to make it so I went to the recruiting officers and the Marines who were the only ones who said, "Son, you're seventeen. That's OK. We can accept you into flight training as soon as pass that little seven-week indoctrination course at San Diego. If you can pass that, then you can apply for flight training" and I thought that was the best chance I had. So that's what I did. Ha! What a laugh. They took every single one of them and put us into the Fleet Marine Force, 2nd Division at Camp Elliott, California, chop, chop and that was it and the closest I ever got to airplanes was watching them fly over. I never gave up hopes of getting to be a fighter pilot. Well, after I got out of the Marine Corps I was on the G.I. Bill and went to college for four years, got a degree in journalism and just as I was graduating about the first of June of 1950 the Korean War started and I heard the Air Force was looking for new pilots to train. I went down and got in line and I made it and so I was a jet fighter pilot during the Korean War even though I never got to Korea. Flew P-51s, F-80s, F-86s, F-89s, B-25s, etc. until I finally got what I wanted. End of the story.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How long did you stay in the Marines?

Mr. Roush:

I was in the Marine Corps exactly four years because I signed up as a regular. If you signed up as a regular, you were considered then a professional Marine and I thought that would enhance my chances at flight training so I was in for exactly four years. In the Air Force I think it was like for

the duration or whatever. I don't recall now how I signed up but anyway I was in for four years but since I got out on a medical discharge as unfit to fly because I was taking off one morning in an old, tired F-80A from Nellis Air Force Base on a gunnery mission in October of 1952 and the engine on my jet fighter exploded, caught on fire and I made a crash landing in the desert, tore up the airplane and was too low to bail out and I just pulled my gear up so I got a compression fracture of my fourth lumbar and spent several months in the hospital, several months in a body cast. Finally got back on the flight train but I was flying with what they call a waiver which meant that as soon as the Air Force didn't need pilots they would look at the medical records and anybody who was flying temporarily on a medical waiver unfit as they were trying to get rid of as many pilots as they could after the Korean War. That caught up with me but I did get a pilot's license, commercial license, instrument license and I flew commercially as a charter pilot, aircraft salesman, etc. for quite a few years afterwards. Finally got the flying out of my system.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Good, good. Now what date were you discharged from the Marines the first time?

Mr. Roush:

Third of July 1946. Went in on the Fourth of July 1942.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Roush:

I guess we all did to a certain extent but then of course I was still in the Marine Corps for six or seven months after the war was over. I was in Pensacola, Florida, gate guard, etc. so it gave me sort of a chance and they gave us all open post and liberty as much as possible so yeah, I sort of got used to it by the time I got out of the Marine Corps. If I hadn't of gone into the Marine Corps

for four years, I would have been out five or six months before and I'd've been dumped out with all the rest of the guys and things were pretty tough. There were a lot of things going on, guys trying to get reoriented. I didn't have that much trouble getting reorientated after the war.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was the morale in your outfit?

Mr. Roush:

You know, those guys not only in my group but typical in all the groups... Those guys were the best fighters in the world and when they're gone the world will never see the likes of them again. When I think about what happened at Tarawa for example, particularly there, that really showed their grit. You could not defeat those men. There was no way. You might kill them, but you never defeated a one of them, not one. I never saw a Marine cry. I never saw one give up. I never saw one turn his back. All I saw was determination, stick to it, kill the bastards, and we're going to survive and a lot of them didn't. I was in a foxhole with a man once on Saipan, scared, he was so scared his body was shaking, but it didn't make a bit of difference. He did exactly what he was supposed to do when he was supposed to. He faced the enemy, he killed some of them, etc. You can't help but be afraid. It's only part of being human but I gave that man credit. It didn't make a bit of difference in his thinking or in his actions. He was as gung-ho as anybody else. I never defeat those guys, never ever defeat them. I never saw anybody with any kind of psychological problems, breakdowns or anything like that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you had any reunions of your outfit?

Mr. Roush:

Oh, yeah, we've had many reunions of the 2nd Marine Division over the years. The last one was

about three years ago in San Diego and I think there was one other guy from my old company but I didn't, we didn't recognize each other but he had been on Tinian I think. Let me add another little P.S. There's something rather unusual that happens to combat veterans. I started noticing it on Saipan. About half-way through we were taking a lot of casualties. So about twice a week we would get replacements, anyway from three or four to maybe seven or eight guys, come up to replace the guys that they'd carried off. You know who would be normally the first one carried out, those guys. And the longer we were in combat, it seemed like the less likely it would be one of the veterans being carried out. You developed a sixth sense after a while that you'd know when to take cover and when not to. I know I developed that on Saipan and there were times when I might be the only guy in our group in the area that was up doing something and other guys hiding behind rocks saying, "Hey, Roush, you're crazy. Don't stand up like that." I just felt it was OK. Then there were other times when I might be the only guy ducking down in my foxhole. The guys walking around and somebody'd get hit. It's uncanny but you develop that sense. I think in talking to other veterans, the guys that were in Europe, etc., the longer you are with it, the less likely you are to get hurt because you just develop that sense.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I've heard that before. Usually the replacements that came in didn't last a day or two a lot of times.

Mr. Roush:

Yeah. This was like the other Roush. He didn't even last twenty-four hours. He came in some time during the day and was carried out that night.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Roush:

Yeah. I managed to get a few. But I also sent quite a few. You know you could mail stuff like on Saipan and Tinian after things had quieted down and we secured the islands, things were, believe it or not, sort of returning half-way to normal. Our government had hired some of the civilians, some of the Chamorros to do construction work, to drive dump trucks, sort of surprised me when we came back from Tinian. You know, the truck would go down the road full of dirt and who's driving it? One of their natives.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's some souvenirs you have?

Mr. Roush:

Well, like I say, they had established a post office and I have Japanese samurai sword that I had evaluated. It's one of the very older ones, made in either 1490 or 1500 and you can get this information from taking the handles off and I've had at least two experts tell me the same story. This was from a Japanese officer that ambushed myself and another BAR man on Saipan. The guy's name was Berne Merrill. We were both BAR men advancing across this area where the Japanese had broken through when we were re-taking the territory and this officer was hidden in a chicken house made out of like bamboo, actually cane stalks, and he was in there with four men and when Merrill and I got within range, opened up on us, and killed Merrill and I don't know how they missed me but anyway I had just walked past some more of his men that were hidden in a hole that had been covered up with railroad ties and at the first shot, that was their signal that they couldn't see in this hole to come out and they shot at me with a pistol or two and threw a couple of grenades at me. Anyway to make a long story short, I don't have time to tell you about it, but anyway I ended up with his pistol, with his sword, with his battle flag, with his

picture. I think he's a Colonel. Let's see, what else? I have several watches. Oh, the bugle, the bugle that a Japanese infantryman blew that second morning on Saipan. I found it just a few feet from my foxhole when I went back to it and I still have that bugle to this day.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. Roush:

Let's see, I can't recall. I mentioned them in my book. The usual medals, Good Conduct Medal, Presidential Unit Citation for Tarawa, had four battle stars, Asiatic-Pacific, etc. I never did get around to collecting any medals that I could have gotten during the Korean War. They did give a few medals out later on. I never sent off for them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK. Anything else you recall from your time in World War II?

Mr. Roush:

Oh, my God. How many tapes do you have?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Three more.

Mr. Roush:

I was just very, very lucky. I was only one of four to come back to the United States out of the two hundred that left in October of 1942. Not saying that they were all killed but there was only four of us still on our feet after twenty-six months.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Only four returned out of how many?

Mr. Roush:

Four out of the original company, there was only four of us left. Well, a lot of them had probably died from malaria. A lot of them got hit with malaria.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever have dengue fever in your group?

Mr. Roush:

Yeah, I had dengue fever. I was one of the first ones to get it on Tarawa. They thought it was malaria so they were giving me quinine and the usual stuff and it just made me sicker. Now malaria can make me delirious. Malaria can make you so sick you feel like you want to die. Can't live long enough through it to get well. Dengue fever is even worse. Every bone, every muscle, every joint in your body, including your head, will hurt for about three days. It will completely incapacitate you. Now that happened to me after the battle of Saipan and after our battalion, 2nd Battalion, 6th Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, 2nd Battalion by ourself was left there on Tarawa to defend the entire length of the chain of islands of about thirty-three miles from the Japanese coming in and re-taking it except maybe for the protection we would have got from the Navy and the Air Force, you know if they could sneak a ship through, they could have tried to re-take the island but I'm sure that our Navy and Air Force kept them away from us. So fortunately for us they didn't try to re-take the island except there was still a lot of Japanese running loose and were for a number of years. In fact I think it was something like four years later, they still discovered two Japanese alive and living underneath the end of the pier on Tarawa. So these were a very, very incredible people. They were tough. Seeing some of the conditions where they had lived, where they had hid out, for an extended length of time, I look at myself and say, "Could I have done that?" I don't think so. But they did. Anyway, getting back to what I was talking about a while ago. I was one of the first ones to get dengue fever when we

were sort of bivouacked out there, spread out on Tarawa and there was nothing but my foxhole and my shelter half and I endured that under those conditions. It would have been so much better if they had had some kind of field hospital set up or something. You know, I thought I was going to die. There was no battle before, no battle since, like Tarawa. It was not like any kind of battle that could be imagined up to that time. The Japanese were all underground. The Marines were all aboveground and I might have mentioned some of the other guys said the same thing. Did not see a live Japanese. Didn't see them until we had killed them, had blown them out of their bunkers. Nearly any place that you went, approaching Tarawa from the beach, you were facing three machine gun emplacements: the one directly in front of you, the one directly to the left of you and the one to the right of you. So if you wanted to attack the one in front, you not only were facing their fire but crossfire from left and right which made them almost impregnable. How the Marines took that island in the end is only because at noon on the second day, they all thought they were going to get killed anyway, they'd never get off the beach, so hell, they might as well go in and get as many Japanese as they could. That was just before I landed and I remember talking to some of the guys that were there under those circumstances and he said "We just charged right across the island, shooting anything, trying to blow up every bunker that we went by." I said, "Then what?" He said, "We got to the other side of it, we turned around and came back. Then we turned around and came back again." In other words they swept from one side of the island to the other and then they turned around and went back, until finally they weren't meeting any resistance. On one pass you couldn't get all the Japanese that were in these bunkers. You'd throw an explosive in that would kill the ones in the front but there were still some in the back.

End of Interview

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