

Admiral Nimitz Foundation
and
University of North Texas
Baine P. Kerr

Interviewer: John Daniels

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Place of Interview: San Antonio, Texas

Mr. Daniels: This is John Daniels interviewing Mr. Baine Kerr for the Admiral Nimitz Museum and Foundation as well as for the University of North Texas. The interview is taking place on May 4, 1993. We are here in San Antonio, and I'm interviewing Baine Kerr about his World War II experiences.

Let us begin, sir, by finding out where and when you were born.

Mr. Kerr: I was born on August 24, 1919, in Rusk, Texas.

Mr. Daniels: And your schooling? Where did you grow up and all that?

Mr. Kerr: Well, my family moved to Houston when I was about five years old. I went to elementary school at Montrose Elementary, which no longer exists. I went to junior high at Sidney Lanier, which does still exist; and senior high at San Jacinto High School, which no longer exists.

Mr. Daniels: What did you do after you graduated from high

school?

Kerr: Then I went to the University of Texas.

Daniels: And when did you start then?

Kerr: That was in the fall of 1936.

Daniels: How long did you get to stay?

Kerr: Well, I completed my undergraduate work in three years.

Daniels: Graduating when?

Kerr: Well, I didn't get my degree until I completed law school, but I had done all the work.

Daniels: I see.

Kerr: I entered law school in 1939, in the fall, and in 1940 --in March, I think--I enlisted in the platoon leader's program that the Marine Corps had. Under that program you had a summer training--two summers--roughly equivalent to boot camp training. Then you were commissioned in the Reserves as a second lieutenant, and then you went to further schooling after that. I thought that we were about to be involved in the war. I had no military training or experience, so I thought that this would be a good way of doing it and still be able to finish my school work. I did go in the summer of 1940 to Quantico in the platoon leader's class, and then, in summer of 1941, we went to Philadelphia to the basic school--the old Marine Corps basic school--where all officer training used to be conducted.

Daniels: So, this is sort of the equivalent to OCS?

Kerr: Sort of, yes. They had us there, but no place to do any field exercises. We spent a couple of weeks in Quantico on the rifle range, and I was in an abbreviated course of what they used to put people through before.

Anyway, I completed that and was in my last semester in law school when Pearl Harbor came along, and I got called to duty. I think I got the orders in March and actually reported in April to Philadelphia once again. So, we then went through the officer training program and completed that by the end of July. We spent our field part of it at Indiantown Gap Army Reservation, out near Hershey, Pennsylvania, and the rest of the time I was in Philadelphia. I think we went down to Quantico, also, on the rifle range at one point, as I recall it.

Daniels: What was the difference between this training and the one you had the summer before?

Kerr: Well, this was much more technical training--map making, tactics, and just basically the officer training. They didn't spend as much time on military courtesy as they used to spend in peacetime (chuckle)...

Daniels: (Chuckle)

Kerr: ...such as leaving two cards on the front hall table, you know, when you called on your commanding officer

and all that sort of thing. That was being pretty well short-circuited (chuckle) at that point, and nobody much bought dress blues or dress whites. We had tailors in Philadelphia that came and measured you for your uniforms and whatnot.

Daniels: At that time what sort of weapons did they train you on?

Kerr: Well, we were issued M-1 rifles--the new rifle--and we fired those for record, and we fired pistols. I had very bad vision in my right eye, and I had to get a waiver to stay in for that reason. I sort of slipped by originally, but they found out about it at that point (chuckle). The M-1 was a big improvement because you could fire off your left shoulder--my left eye was good. The Springfield bolt-action rifle, you had to fire off your right shoulder, so I had a hard time locating the target for that. I managed to qualify, but just barely, for the rifle. But I shot expert with a pistol.

Daniels: Oh, that's something!

Kerr: Yes. Most people did it just the other way around. But, at any rate, it was just an abbreviated version of what they had covered in about seven months before that.

Daniels: And the total time this time was...?

Kerr: This time was about four months. Three-and-a-half

months maybe.

Daniels: So, they didn't train you in grenades or machine guns?

Kerr: Oh, yes. We learned how to fire all of the weapons-- heavy machine guns, grenades, mortars. Not artillery, but, I mean, all of the infantry weapons.

Daniels: So, you were being trained for an infantry slot?

Kerr: Yes. That was what everybody was trained for in the officer school. Then, if you were going into the artillery, you would apply for the artillery school and go to Fort Sill; if you were going to be a communications officer, you could apply to go somewhere else for that, etc. But everybody, whatever you were going to be, went through the same officer training.

Daniels: Everybody got to be a "grunt" first.

Kerr: That's right. In the Marine Corps that's the "Cock-of-the-Walk," you know. You apologize you're in something else.

Daniels: (Chuckle).

Kerr: But, anyhow, at that time, in July of 1942, they called us in and said, "Fill out all these forms, and you can request further training somewhere." He said, "It doesn't make any difference what you put down. The only choice you've really got is East Coast or West Coast, but you're all going into the FMF--the Fleet Marine Force." And, nearly all of us did. There were some who got orders to go to places like...oh, I think they

sent some to Iceland, some to the Canary Islands, or various places of that type for some specialized kind of duty, but that was just a very small number who did that.

I chose the West Coast because I lived in Texas, and I wanted to go through that way. At this point I got married while I was in the officer training course --in June--and my wife lived in San Antonio--her family. We were married while I was at Indiantown Gap because her family originally all came from around Lewisburg, West Virginia, which is right on the Virginia line, in the southeastern part near White Sulphur Springs. So, we were married there. They let you travel from Indiantown Gap to Philadelphia on your own. You could make your own arrangements, and that let you have a weekend, in effect. So, I took the train down, and we got married on Saturday night, and my brother, who was an FBI agent in Washington at the time, and my mother came up for the wedding. They picked us up about 5:30 in the morning, and we drove to Washington and caught a train to Philadelphia--big honeymoon (chuckle).

Daniels: When and where had you met?

Kerr: Oh, we had met at school--at the university--and we were planning to get married, but I felt I needed to have a job that paid at least \$125 a month. We

couldn't live on anything less than that. Of course, a lot of people did at the time. But when this all came along, I didn't think we ought to get married because you don't know what's going to happen to you and all.

Daniels: Right.

Kerr: But my wife had different ideas, so we got married, and we are still married.

Daniels: It worked out.

Kerr: Anyway, we went back through Houston and San Antonio to visit family and picked up the car that I'd had in law school, and we drove on out to San Diego to report. I don't where we reported in--the commanding general, anyway, there.

Daniels: And when was this?

Kerr: This was at the end of July, 1942. There were about five of us--we had all been in the same class--out there, and they sent us all to the 6th Marines. The 6th Marines had been in Iceland. They made up the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade. They spent about ten months in Iceland. This was before Pearl Harbor, before we were at war, theoretically, but I'd say it was a somewhat provocative act. But Hitler didn't rise to the bait. We sent destroyers over. We'd done a lot of things. He didn't like it, but he didn't do anything. Anyhow, they had been in Iceland, and they had come back, and then they supplied the cadres for a

couple of other regiments that were just opening up Camp Pendleton. What was left of the 6th Marines remained at Camp Elliot, and then they were being brought up to strength out of new recruits and new officers and whatnot.

I think all five of us went to 1st Battalion, 6th Marines. The commanding officer at that time was a man named Russell Lloyd. "Whitey" Lloyd, he was called. He'd been a big football star at the Naval Academy--a great, big fellow. We went in his office, and he said, "Well, what do you want to do?" So, we all looked at each other (chuckle), and, what do you say? I made a big mistake of speaking or responding, which I should have let somebody else. I said, "Well, what sort of jobs are you looking for for people to fill?" He said, "God Almighty! They sent you people through school, and you don't even know what's in a rifle battalion!" (chuckle)

Daniels: (Chuckle)

Kerr: "You have a rifle platoon; you have a mortar platoon; you have a machine gun platoon!" I said, "Well, whatever!" (chuckle)

Daniels: (Chuckle)

Kerr: So, we all went into mostly rifle platoons. That had been foreordained, anyway. We knew that. One or two were in a weapons company--mortars. One became a

battalion antiaircraft officer--all by himself. The weapon to fend off the airplane attacks was a 50-caliber machine gun mounted on a tripod. It was never, never used and never would have been effective if it had been.

Anyhow, we were there, and the biggest problem was finding a place to live. Nobody in San Diego was very happy to see anybody in uniform, particularly a Marine, and they knew you weren't going to be there very long. But I was lucky. I had a roommate in law school who had gone in a little earlier than I had and had gone to artillery school and was in what was to become the 3rd Marine Division at Pendleton. Another fellow in his battery lived in a little town that would be convenient to Camp Elliot, and he said maybe this friend of his might be able to help us find a place to live there. So, we went out on a Sunday and met the people there, and this little town turned out to be a place called Rancho Santa Fe. That's where "the rich elephants" go to die, you know--very wealthy people living there and a beautiful place. I don't know if you've ever been there, but you know what I mean.

Daniels: Yes.

Kerr: I knew that I wouldn't be able to afford that. The man that ran the place said, "Well, we don't have many apartments here. Everybody has homes. But there is

one four-unit apartment building, and there might be a possibility that you can sublease this for three or four months. You probably aren't going to be here for a long term." I said, "Well, that's right." But I said, "I think that's very nice, but I feel quite sure that it's nothing we could afford." He said, "Well, let's go down and look at it." So, we went down to look at it, and it was really nice--two bedrooms, two baths, fully furnished, everything. Very big picture window, an orange grove and a golf course behind it, you know.

He said, "How do you like it?" I said, "Well, I like it fine, but I think we're just wasting your time because I don't think there is any way we could possibly afford to live here." He said, "Well, you're a second lieutenant." I said, "Yes, sir." I had a second lieutenant's uniform on. He said, "You get a housing allowance, don't you?" And I said, "Oh, yes." I forgot what it was--like, \$50 a month, I think. I forget what it was at that time. It wasn't much. He said, "Well, why don't we just say you don't need to rent the back room and bath. I won't lock it off or anything. If you want to use it you can, but we'll just say that's not part of the deal, and we'll just make the rent your housing allowance." Having been kicked out of every apartment complex in San Diego, you

know, (chuckle) that was a great surprise, a wonderful thing.

They were worried about a possible Japanese landing on the West Coast at that point. There had been some sightings, and I think a submarine had fired a few rounds on the West Coast. So, the entire regiment spent two nights out of three on the base, so you only left the base one night in three. Then, later, they made it every other day.

My wife was recruited to be a coast watcher, watching for airplanes, and she was assigned to the house that was owned by the movie star Corinne Griffith, who was married to the owner of the Washington Redskins. George Marshall, I think his name was. They had a nice terrace up on the second floor with a good view, so they could sit up there and have Cokes and tea and watch the airplanes. I don't think they could have identified one if they came over, but it was a very pleasant place to be at the time.

Our training was very rigorous. They decided that we needed to be trained as airborne infantry. The Germans had airborne infantry. Of course, that was when we were beginning to do that sort of thing. The only problem was that they didn't have any planes to use except PBVs. When you get in a PBV, you lie down flat on the bottom of it. I remember we flew over near

Barstow or somewhere in the desert--absolutely burning up, you know. We jumped out and ran around for a while and then got back on the plane and flew back.

Daniels: This was parachuting?

Kerr: No, not parachuting.

Daniels: This was landing the plane.

Kerr: This was airborne infantry.

Daniels: So, you just landed the plane, and you guys jumped out.

Kerr: Yes.

Daniels: I see.

Kerr: Very scientific (chuckle).

Daniels: (Chuckle)

Kerr: We also had rubber boat training down at the stables at the Del Mar Racetrack. In California at that time, you couldn't turn on a headlight at night, so that was very exciting to drive down the Coastal Highway without any headlights (chuckle).

Daniels: (Chuckle) Yes, I guess it would be.

Kerr: Anyway, we finally got orders to leave. I think the order was addressed to the assistant division commander Pedro Del Valle. He was, I believe, Puerto Rican, but he was a well-known officer, I gather. The order said that he would take the 6th Regiment, Reinforced, and the remainder of the headquarters troops to "duty beyond the seas." That line stuck in my mind: "to duty beyond the seas."

Daniels: (Laughter) Oh, good!

Kerr: (Chuckle) "Due to the unsettled conditions in the area, transportation for dependents is not provided."
(chuckle) So, anyway, we didn't know where we were going, but we went down to San Diego.

Daniels: When was this?

Kerr: This was in early October.

Daniels: In 1942.

Kerr: In 1942. We went down there, and we would go aboard ship, which was the Matsonia, one of the Matson Line steamers--a big ship. We would go aboard ship, put all of our gear there--footlockers, carbines, helmets, whatever. I guess they put four officers into a stateroom that would have been very crowded for two people. They put a lot of the troops down in the swimming pool and in various places just to fill the place up. But then they would give you liberty, and you wouldn't have to report back until the next morning. You didn't know when you were going to sail. You knew you were going to sail, and you knew that it would be some day, but you wouldn't know until you actually did sail. So, the wives of married officers were all there, and they didn't know when they would going to be seeing their husbands again. After about three days of this, one morning, about the time they would have told us that we could go ashore, we were

under way. So, we waved up to the cocktail lounge at the hotel overlooking the harbor, where we knew our wives were watching.

Daniels: What hotel was this?

Kerr: Oh, let's see. It's still there. The name slips my mind right now. It's a nice hotel. The El Cortez.

Daniels: So, you're waving good-by.

Kerr: We waved good-by, and we were off. We didn't know where we were going. We didn't know whether we were going to a cold climate or a hot climate. We thought maybe we'd be going directly to Guadalcanal. Maybe that's what the plans had been, but the Japanese Navy came out there, and they had the big naval battles in October. We were supposed to go in a convoy. There were going to be a lot of ships. We got out of the harbor, looking around, but that convoy never showed up. So, we went out all alone.

Daniels: What happened to the convoy?

Kerr: I don't know.

Daniels: You never found out?

Kerr: We never found out. You know, they don't tell you anything. Things just happen, and, I imagine, just putting two and two together, that they took all of the cruisers and destroyers and sent them out there to take part in these naval battles.

Anyway, the Matsonia could cruise between twenty-

five to twenty-seven knots, so we went plowing straight across the Pacific. We didn't zig-zag or anything else, but we went at a pretty rapid clip. It would be pretty hard for a submarine to trail you because they can't really make anything like that speed--submarines at that time couldn't.

One thing occurred that was of interest. We provided lookouts and gun crews. They had mounted some guns on the Matsonia--40-millimeter Bofors antiaircraft guns--and one of our lookouts one night spotted this great light out off our port beam some distance away, and then another light. He reported they were flares, which, I think, they turned out to be Eddie Rickenbacker shooting flares. His crew had been forced down at sea, and they had been in a rubber raft for something like twenty-seven days. We spotted them. That was reported, and somebody picked them up.

Anyway, first thing we knew, we pulled into this beautiful harbor. It took about eleven days. This was in Auckland, New Zealand, and it was really a beautiful spot--the passage into the harbor. There were ferries, and one came out with a band on it, playing. So, we got a big welcome. Then, we found out that we were at the wrong place; we weren't supposed to be there (chuckle). So, we set sail again and went down to Wellington, New Zealand, which was also a beautiful

harbor. Then we went by train about thirty miles, thirty-five miles out to a New Zealand Army Camp-- McKay's Crossing Camp. It was at McKay's Crossing. It was their little place called Paekakariki. It was just called "Pie-Cock" by the Marines. This was a little camp, and they had kind of like doghouses that you slept in. You had to get on your hands and knees and crawl into these little wooden houses--just exactly like a kennel.

Daniels: (Chuckle) Oh, good!

Kerr: Our regimental commander was a man named Gilder Jackson. He won the Congressional Medal of Honor in France in World War I. He was a fine guy and very nice man. He was overly fond of the bottle, I guess. In peacetime he had been bored, I guess. That's one of the hazards of military life. He had had crated up all of the remaining liquor supplies at the Camp Elliot officer's club--all marked as medical gear, so we were well provided for in that regard. He had picked an old farmhouse, and that was the officer's wine mess. We didn't have anything to do except train, hike up and down this big grassy knoll.

[Tape 1, Side 2]

Daniels: Okay, you're marching up and down the hills.

Kerr: And really getting in great condition physically. I don't think any of us before or after that were in

such good health. We got up before dawn, ran down, did all these exercises, calisthenics and whatnot. It was really very enjoyable. You'd take your platoon or your company out, and you'd do whatever you do--climb up a mountain or go to a rifle range. Well, it wasn't a rifle range, but a range in the forest up there where targets could suddenly be pulled out. You didn't know where they would be, and you would adjust to that. It was good training.

At night there wasn't a whole lot to do except to go to this officer's wine mess, and the drinks were two ounces for a dime. That's actually what a bottle of whiskey cost without any taxes for it. At that time, you could have liquor at military posts, and gasoline and all, without paying tax. Gasoline was cheaper than water in California--literally. Anyway, we'd sing all these songs that they had learned in Iceland from the British, which were not singable in mixed company. We went on liberty into Wellington. You'd take the train in. But you were not permitted to go to the Saint George Hotel, where the division commander and the division staff were quartered. The rumor was that one of the lieutenants from our regiment or one of the others had moved in on the staff's girls.

Daniels: Oh (chuckle)!

Kerr: Whatever the reason, they said we couldn't go there.

We couldn't go to the enlisted men's place--the Cecil Hotel--because that was only for enlisted men. So, if you were an officer, you just had to "make do." You could go to a movie or go wherever. Now, with the liquor laws there, they served no liquor except in a hotel and in a licensed pub, but the pubs all had to close about 6:00 in the afternoon. So, the workers would get off work and go in there. They would line up all these drinks on the counter, and they'd just drink as many drinks as they could drink in an hour's time. They'd be roaring drunk, of course, when they got home. But we couldn't go there because of that, and the hotels could not serve. You could serve liquor only when you were serving food, so that service was over by 10:00. So, there really was not many things to do but go to a movie or something.

Anyhow, this story is true, but it seems so bizarre now that I almost think it didn't happen. You know how that is! But, I know it did. At any rate, the division staff were having a big old time there at their digs in the Saint George Hotel, squiring all the young ladies around. They went through all their liquor refreshments, and they were down to having nothing to drink, which was something that they really didn't think they could handle. The word had gotten out that we had all this stuff out at our place, so

Colonel Jackson was notified that they wanted to move our supply of booze down to the Saint George. Well, this really prompted a lot of the old fire in the colonel (chuckle). He called us and said, "Well, this is what had happened." So, he said he had notified the staff that in a recent earthquake, the tremors that we'd had, all bottles had been broken, and we didn't have anything. He said, "They won't believe that, of course, so this is what we're gonna do." He said, "Each of you has got your entrenching tool. You get it good and sharp, get a poncho. Go out there in the vicinity of your dog-house and lay the poncho down and take out the turf very carefully. Put the grass on top, and then dig out enough dirt where you can put a case of whiskey in it. Put the dirt back in, put the turf back in, tamp it down. We'll inspect it to make sure that they can't see it." Everything grows very well, very green--a lot of grass. So, that was done. Then, when they needed anything, they could just dig up a case, you know.

Well, they promptly sent out a station wagon full of people to go find where we had hid this stuff because they knew we had it. They looked everywhere, but they never did find it. They knew we had it because they got reports of our being able to serve people (chuckle).

Daniels: What's this general's name?

Kerr: It was [name deleted]. He really was more of an administrator than he was a field commander. He was big on all the regulations, and he could run a barrack or a base.

Daniels: By the book.

Kerr: By the book, all of that. He never got up to Guadalcanal, but his whole division was there.

Daniels: So, how did he manage not to go?

Kerr: Well, they said that he couldn't go because he was senior in rank to the Army general, who was at that point in charge, and it just wouldn't work out for him to be there. Further, like many other senior officers at that time, he was probably not physically capable of active field duty in the harsh environment of this theater.

Daniels: I see.

Kerr: I don't know whether that was the reason or not, but he was replaced, anyway, fairly shortly. So, our group, after the escapade with the liquid supplies, composed a ditty and had it typed it up on toilet paper. This thing was not too flattering to the general.

Daniels: Toilet paper (chuckle)!

Kerr: We'd sing it to the tune of one of the popular English songs. But, at any rate: "We can't go to the Saint George because the staff is in a whirl. It seems that

some lieutenant got to the general's girl." That was the opening stanza (chuckle).

Daniels: (Chuckle) Oh, let's hear it all! Can you remember it all?

Kerr: I don't remember it all.

Daniels: Oh, shucks!

Kerr: Well, the verse is: It's the "Ball of Karriemuir." That's a Scottish name, and it's a wonderful song, but it's not one that is printable. It's a traditional British Army-Scottish song. The verse in it, the chorus, I guess it should be, is: "How do you, lassie? How do you do? The man that did you last night, he canna do you noo." That goes in at the end of each thing. A lot of revelry up there at Karriemuir, as you might guess. So, what we said was...oh, the other thing I remember that our chorus said: "How do you, Leatherneck? How do you do? The General did you last night, he canna do you noo." (chuckle)

Daniels: (Chuckle)

Kerr: So, volunteers went into town and got into the Saint George, got into his office, and left the roll of paper on his desk so he could enjoy that.

Daniels: (Laughter)

Kerr: A bit of poetry.

Daniels: Yes.

Kerr: Anyhow, as I say, all of that is a little hard for me,

thinking back on it, to visualize it happening. But it did.

Daniels: Not really.

Kerr: Then we got orders that we were going up to Guadalcanal, and we went down and boarded...there were these President Line ships that they were using. They didn't have transports; we were having to use cruise ships. So, this was the American President Line: Hayes, Jackson, and Adams. I think we went up on the Hayes, but I'm not absolutely sure which one it was. They were all sister ships. No escort--just go up there.

Daniels: When was this?

Kerr: This was in December, 1942. We once again mounted whatever guns they had on board. We were not sunk or sighted or shot at, and we landed there at Guadalcanal right at the end of December. We had Christmas dinner aboard ship. The water was so deep in the ocean; it drops right off. You can almost run a big ship like that right up on the beach or very close to the beach.

We had to unload that ship in a big hurry because we had these air raids, and Japanese ships would come down at night and all that. So, we got it unloaded, and they took off, and we were billeted for a few days there near the beach and Henderson Field. Then we were ordered up to relieve the 2nd Regiment, which was one

of our sister regiments. They had been in the original landing at Guadalcanal and had been through the whole campaign, so they were being relieved.

Daniels: This is how long after the landing now?

Kerr: Well, they landed in August. You mean our landing?

Daniels: Your landing is how long after the original landing?

Kerr: The original landing was on August 7, so this was around January 1.

Daniels: So, it's well secured now.

Kerr: No (chuckle), it wasn't. It was not very well secured. In fact, they were still coming down. Their planes were coming down--Japanese planes--and Japanese ships were coming down.

Daniels: I mean, were the Japanese troops cleared from the island?

Kerr: Oh, no! No! They were there. In fact, everyone expected them to lay on reinforcements and mount a new offensive. The lines had been static since early November, so when we went up there, it was just like World War I. There were trenches, sand bags, pillboxes, you know. They'd been in there in this defensive position. They pulled back. They'd gone up further, but then they pulled back to a tighter perimeter.

My platoon had a forward position that we took over, and the first day we were there, a Japanese

sniper opened up with a machine gun. He was up in a tree where he could more or less fire down on these forward positions. There were two men in this position, and he fired on them. One was a man named Watson, and the other one was...oh, well, it'll come to me later, but I can't think of it now. Watson was shot in the shoulder and arm, and the other man got a burst of machine gun fire right in his throat. He was bleeding profusely. So, I got a corporal--his name was Orr--and we wanted to go out and pull them back in. So, we had everybody else open fire--you know, covering fire. Then we crawled down, and we got these two guys. The one that was more seriously wounded was a very stocky, muscular fellow. He was covered with blood, and I had never realized how slippery blood was. It was very hard to get a grip on him and drag him back, but we did. We got them back, and, actually, they both recovered, strangely enough. Later on--I'm getting ahead of myself--when I was in the hospital in Auckland, they came by to see me. The man that was shot in the throat, it affected his voice. He could talk, but it was not his normal voice, and they were sending him back to the States. I don't know what happened to him. Watson stayed on with us. The other guy did live because he's on a roll I saw recently. He lives in Mississippi.

Anyway, we were there for a few days and sent out patrols and whatnot, and then we got orders that we were going to attack, mount an offensive to drive them off the island. So, at this point, we were under the command of General Patch--an Army general. General Vandergriff had gone back. They relieved all the regiments that had been in the original landing there--the 2nd from our division and the 1st, 5th, and 7th from the 1st Division--and they left the 8th Marines, who were also from the 2nd Division and had been there longer than we had. They left them and us there, and we made up, kind of for convenience, what they called the Americal or some kind of...I don't think that was the name, either, but it was an Army regiment and Marines. It was our duty, our job, to move up the coast. Then there was an Army division, the 25th Division, that was to go up in the interior, up above around Mount Austin. That's an 8,000 foot mountain in the middle of the island. They were going to come back behind the Japanese positions, and we were going to trap them. That was the idea. So, we had various skirmishes and battles of one type or another--nothing on a large scale. We didn't have the foggiest notion where we were, and all you had was a photograph.

Daniels: A photograph?

Kerr: Well, what am I trying to say? The kind of a...

Daniels: Aerial map.

Kerr: Aerial photograph. All you could see were trees and the coastline. If you weren't on the coast, then for all you knew you were in the trees. You couldn't report your position; you didn't know where you were!

Anyway, we were caught in an artillery barrage one night, and our battalion lost about seven men. We had other casualties in these things, but not heavy casualties.

We overran, without any warning, the Japanese headquarters one morning. We just came down through the woods off of this kind of a mountain, and we saw these people up, walking around, cooking. They paid no attention much to anything. They didn't have any outposts or anything. Very strange! So, we opened fire, and they returned some fire, but not much. It was very one-sided. It turned out that these were really the people who were too...we didn't know it at the time, but they were the Japanese who were probably not well enough to really keep up with the rest. So, they just left them behind to be killed, and they were disposed of--about 600 or 700 of them.

Then we went on, and a day or two later I was acting as company commander at this point because the company executive officer had been wounded.

Daniels: Who was that?

Kerr: His name was Martin Freeman. They called him "Knucks." He was a heck of a fine guy. He'd been an enlisted man and was commissioned. He was shot at some point along the way. "Chuck" Durfee--Charles R. Durfee--the company commander, and he was a super guy, a great officer in every respect.

Daniels: You called him "Durf."

Kerr: "Durf." He was sick, so I ended up acting as the company commander. We stopped--we had encountered no opposition that day--right on the coast road. So, we stopped, and the usual procedure was that when you stopped at night you had to dig in and put out wire, sight your machine guns--just be all prepared for a night attack because you never knew when they might do that. So, we were doing that.

Then, also, in accordance to the usual practice, I sent a patrol out in front. They were to go up another 1,000 yards maybe and see what lay ahead up there. Well, they got up, and they were immediately--almost immediately--fired on. So, I took two runners with me and went up to see what the situation was. I was talking to a sergeant, and they opened up again with a machine gun, and I was hit in my right leg, right thigh. A bullet went kind of behind the sergeant's jaw and out his mouth. It didn't really hurt him too badly. He lost a few teeth, I'm sure. But we had

several people wounded. They had set up an ambush, and they had heavy machine guns.

So, these two runners came up to drag me out, and they weren't supposed to do that. The rule was that you don't go to a wounded man. You let him try to move or take care of him later because if you go there you're very likely to get shot, too. Well, that's what happened. They were pulling me back--one holding me by one shoulder and one by the other--and I was just being dragged along between them. But they opened up again with the machine gun, and one fellow on one side was hit in both legs, and the one on the other side was hit right in the middle of his back. All I could see is that there was just like a blossoming, you know. His blood just bloomed out from his back. So, we were all on the ground then, and we managed to crawl on out, and we dragged this fellow out.

Daniels: The one with the back injury?

Kerr: Yes. So, they patched me up and gave me a shot of morphine and a bit of brandy. That's the usual practice, too, to prevent shock. I was feeling fine at that point (chuckle). Anyway, they put me on a litter, and I was being carried out by four men from my company--my platoon sergeant and three others--and a photographer popped out from behind a palm tree and took a flash picture. I sort of looked up to see what

was going on. Well, that photograph became used in almost all Guadalcanal books and everything else. It's just done without reference to the date or where it was or who the people are. But I wrote General Simmons a note the other day just to identify for the record when it happened, where it happened, and who the people were.

Daniels: So, you knew who the men were who carried you then. They were all four from your company.

Kerr: Yes. One of them was killed on Tarawa. Maybe two. And one of them, I don't know what happened to him. The platoon sergeant as last reported, as far as I know, is still alive and well over in Louisiana.

Daniels: Who was that?

Kerr: Joe Cado. He was really a great noncom.

Daniels: So, they're carrying you back.

Kerr: So, I was back. There were good many people who had been wounded in this thing, and they put us on Jeep ambulances. We were about twelve or fourteen miles from Henderson Field, near a place called Tassafaronga Point. It was night by the time we got there, and they put us in an underground bomb shelter-like thing. It was just a trench that had been dug out, and then they put coconut logs over the top and leaves over the top to camouflage it. It was open at each end. Everybody there was not ambulatory, so you were just lying in

there. You were not able to move around or anything, and some of the people were pretty seriously wounded. Anyway, the corpsman did not bother to tell anybody that he put all these wounded people down in this bomb shelter. We managed to make enough noise where somebody finally heard us, and we were taken out of there.

At any rate, most of us were evacuated by a hospital plane. We took off, and you were in like a stretcher mounted inside the plane and lashed and belted in so you don't fall out, but you could still see out the window. As we took off from Henderson Field and were just a few hundred feet off the ground, a flight of nine Japanese medium bombers came in from exactly the opposite direction. We flew right through their formation, as it turned out (chuckle), but we were not shot down.

We were evacuated down to the New Hebrides Islands, to Espiritu Santo, and then they had a little forward hospital there, and I spent about five days there. We had a corpsman, a fellow named Cox--he was called "Foxhole Cox" because once they had an air raid on this hospital, and in running to get to the foxhole without regard to the patients, he had stumbled and had either broken his ankle or sprained it; so, he got the nickname "Foxhole" for that one--but all he was good

for was just to scrounge something to serve at cocktail hour. We had some very seriously wounded people--pilots, PT boat people who had been wounded in the big night of the Japanese evacuation. We hadn't known that they were removing all their troops from the island. Nobody knew that apparently.

Daniels: How long was that after it happened that you got hurt, or was it happening at that time?

Kerr: Oh, not very long. Let's say a week afterwards. So, anyway, they had a ship called Solace, a hospital ship, that moved patients down from this hospital to Auckland to the Navy Hospital Number Four--Mobile Hospital Number Four. There were temporary buildings in this public park called the Domain in Auckland. So, anyway, we were evacuated on the hospital ship. It was a very eerie feeling because it was painted all white and had red crosses all over the hull and around, and then they would sail at night with all the lights on--no mistaking what it was. But the Japanese never sank it or anything, so they went by the rules of the Geneva Convention as to that, anyway. We got down to the hospital...

[Tape 2, Side 1]

Daniels: So, you had no clothes, and you were wrapped in a blanket.

Kerr: The 3rd Marine Division was being billeted around

Auckland. They'd come out from the States. One day while I was in this ward--a big, open ward--I saw Colonel Puller, Sam Puller, a brother of Lewis Puller, who had been our platoon leader at officer school. He terrified everybody, as did his brother, but he was actually a very kindly man underneath it all. Anyway, he was going out to check on some of the people from the 3rd Division who were sick or had been sent out. He walked by my bed. He made no comment. He just sort of glanced over and went on by. Then he turned around and came back, and he said, "You're Kerr from the 3rd ROC, aren't you?" And I said, "Yes, I am." He said, "What in the hell are you doing here?" That was his usual opening statement. I told him that I had been shot up there, and he said, "Well, where are your uniforms." I said, "Well, I don't have any." So, he sort of snorted and walked off. About two days later, he came back. He had a big box in his arms, and he had had uniforms made up for me out of enlisted greens, which is what I had, then, to wear. But this was just typical of the man, you know. He looked out for his people. His bark was many times worse than his bite. He was killed by a sniper at Guam later on.

At any rate, I started getting better, and they encouraged me to go out and use my leg as much as I could. I first had to use crutches, but then I started

getting strength back in the leg. I had met people when I had gone to church--local people. There was one family, and the man was a chief buyer for what was called a "freezing works," which is a place where they slaughtered the animals, boned them, quick-froze them, and shipped them around the world. They were very advanced in that, and they really fed just about everybody in the Pacific area--all of the troops and everybody else.

Daniels: What was this man's name?

Kerr: His name was McDonald--Gordon McDonald. In any case, he asked me if I would like to go on a trip where he was going out to buy sheep for the company he worked for. So, we went down to the south of Auckland, beautiful country--very English countryside-looking. We would go in and go to the farmers' houses, usually have lunch with them, and then he would buy the sheep and mark them, and they'd be picked up later. We stayed in a little hotel. It's a wonderful country, but I won't go on about that. The people were marvelous--marvelously friendly--and very reserved, very old-fashioned, but very, very helpful.

I was getting along fine, but then I got sick with malaria. This is what happened to everybody. I got really very sick. I got a temperature up to 105 and was sweating and shaking and, you know, the whole

thing. It was obvious what my problem was, but they wouldn't give you quinine unless they got a positive blood smear showing that you did, in fact, have malaria. You could have all the symptoms where it is perfectly obvious, and 95 percent of the people who had been at Guadalcanal developed malaria. But I just got sicker and sicker, but I was diagnosed as having "cat" fever--catarral fever--which is a universal ailment in the U.S. Navy. If anybody got sick, they would usually diagnose it as "cat" fever. They gave you an AC pill. It was aspirin and caffeine and something else, and usually it would make you feel better, anyway. It would make your fever go down. But they finally came in one day and said, "Oh, you've got the very worst kind of malaria! You've got malignant tertian." Tertian, meaning every third day...I don't know that I detected any difference between that and the so-called benign tertian, but I guess it was more serious, and it was more likely to go to some vital organ like your brain or something. People would die just walking down the street. So, I was pretty sick from that and had to recover from that, and that extended my stay in that hospital to about three months.

Finally, I was able to go. The 3rd Division was commanded at that time by General Barrett--Charles D. Barrett.

Daniels: When did they finally release you from the hospital?

Kerr: Well, let's see. It must have been in April or May.

Daniels: Of 1943?

Kerr: Yes. Charles Barrett was my father-in-law's first cousin, it turned out. When I got in the Marine Corps, I didn't know my wife had all these family connections here. But General Barrett was a very famous...well, he was supposed to have been one of the real architects of the amphibious doctrine of the Marine Corps and Navy. The assistant division commander was General Turnage-- Hal Turnage--and he was married to another first cousin of my father-in-law's. This is a strange thing, you know, about running into people. The division surgeon was a doctor named Lockett Arbuckle, and he and my father-in-law had grown up in this little town of Lewisburg as best friends--a city of about 5,000 people. It turned out that I had friends at the division headquarters.

Daniels: Friends you didn't even know about.

Kerr: The aide to the general had been a friend of mine at officer school, and he took me out there, so I had dinner there once or twice. The division company commander looked after the officers' mess, among other things, and whatever else. He was one of the Kriendler brothers. He was Bob Kriendler. There was Jack and Charlie and Bob Kriendler, and they owned the 21 Club

in New York; that's a famous restaurant now. So, he was the youngest one of the brothers.

Daniels: Which one was that now?

Kerr: Bob. Anyway, it was all a very pleasant interlude once I got over the wound. The only other excitement there was when a British destroyer flotilla pulled into port, and they had announced to one and all that there was not going to be a "Yank"--I guess they would have said --on the streets by nightfall. Little did they know, I guess, that there was a whole division of "Yanks" in the vicinity.

Daniels: (Chuckle)

Kerr: So, there was a big street fight. I was downtown on crutches, and there wasn't anything I could do about it. But they shouldn't have picked that fight because they (chuckle) were pretty well outgunned, and the New Zealanders joined in on the side of the "Yanks."

Daniels: (Chuckle) You were there first, huh?

Kerr: Well, there's always this rivalry in the military. I had a sergeant, and everytime he'd go on liberty he'd pick a fight with some sailor. He just didn't like sailors. I'd get a report that they had arrested him. He was fine, except when he went on liberty.

Daniels: You were on crutches? Was this from the malaria?

Kerr: From the gunshot.

Daniels: From the gunshot.

Kerr: Yes. I was shot right through here (gesture), and it severed...it didn't hit the bone, and it didn't hit that main artery. If it had, that would have been the end of it. It came very close to it, but it did sever the main muscle there. So, that had to heal before I could have any strength there, before I could use my right leg. Anyway, that was one exciting evening in town.

Daniels: Did you finally get back into training?

Kerr: Yes.

Daniels: Where were you assigned?

Kerr: Well, I was sent back to my old unit.

Daniels: Oh, really?

Kerr: By this time they were back down at McKay's Crossing Camp or near there. They had a whole new camp that they had built there, and the entire division was back in New Zealand at this point. But the big problem was that this malaria just was rampant through the 2nd Division and the 1st Division. They were both really precluded from doing much of anything until they got that under control.

They did one thing that I think was really interesting, and I don't know how widespread it was. I think it was pretty much throughout the division, though. The people in New Zealand volunteered to have a Marine come and live with them out on a farm or

wherever they lived for a month. They were given a month's leave to go out and really just to get over the malaria. It was a cool climate with outdoor activities and all. It was really the best medicine--about the only way, really, to get over it. It was pretty remarkable, to have the whole country do that, so there was a very good feeling between the troops and the people. In fact, when we left and landed at Tarawa, the headlines in the local paper said: "Our Troops In Action!"

Daniels: (Chuckle) Very nice!

Kerr: That was a typical headline, you know. They don't have the kind of headlines we have.

So, anyhow, I got back there, and I was the company executive officer then. We got our health back. I had a number of recurrences, but I never had the malignant variety again, though. They had a hospital, a place called "Silver Stream," and that's where people would go back and forth all the time when they would have an attack, or they could try to last it out. The only way you could control it was with quinine.

One time we were at "Silver Stream," and they had an Italian doctor that they'd brought in. Malaria is very widespread in the Po Valley in Italy, and he had a theory that when you got over an attack of malaria,

these parasites or whatever it is--a virus--settle in your spleen. Your spleen becomes enlarged, and then they rebuild and come back out in your bloodstream, and you have another attack. The quinine tends to control it, drive them back into the spleen. So, his theory was to give a patient massive doses of...oh, what's the heart stimulant? Not nitroglycerin but...oh, I can't think of the name of it, but it's a very common thing. Adrenaline has the effect, anyway, of shrinking the spleen. The idea is that it would force the virus out into your bloodstream. You started out taking large doses of this stuff, which really bounces you off the ceiling, you know. It's just very stimulating. Then he would follow that with massive doses of quinine. The idea was you force the viruses out, and then you crush them with quinine. But, actually, the thing didn't work, and it is a wonder that it didn't kill some people.

Well, because of the illness of the division, I think morale was looked upon as pretty low. So, someone got the bright idea that they would prove to everyone that they were still capable of fighting and exerting themselves, so they decided to have this march up to a town about fifty miles north of our camp, a town called Foxton. The idea was that the entire division would make this march. You would carry your

full gear, the full pack--double pack--the bedroll and your weapon, your unit of fire. In your top pack you'd have your rations and clean socks and what you're supposed to pack, and you'd wear your steel helmet. The mortar squads would take their mortars, base plates, the tube; and the machine gunners would carry the heavy machine guns. Just an ordinary rifleman without any special gear was carrying probably somewhere between seventy and eighty pounds on his back. It was a paved road and, as I said, fifty miles. So, we started out. They had everybody do it, even the bandsmen. In combat they would be corpsmen--stretcher bearers--so they went along carrying the stretchers and whatever they would need. So, it was everybody. Of course, they were not in very good physical shape, living in town and playing their horns. At any rate, this whole affair was written up by Leon Uris in his first book, called Battle Cry.

Daniels: I read the book.

Kerr: Well, he was in our regiment, so it's a pretty authentic description of it all. I won't go into it all. It's all been chronicled there.

Our particular battalion during this period was being trained to be a rubber boat battalion, be equipped with rubber boats, the idea being that you might go in ahead of a landing. You could slip in,

come in via submarine and rubber boats, and go in and facilitate the landing or disrupt the enemy's communication lines--sort of like a raider group. So, they assigned to us a very fast transport. It was a small transport, relatively, but it had been designed and built as a fast transport. It could do twenty-five to thirty knots. It was called the Feland. There were only two of them, the Feland and the Degen. We would go down, like, to the south island of New Zealand, around up in these fjords, and go paddle in in the rubber boats with all our gear.

On one occasion we were in the rubber boats, and a sudden wind blew up. It blew us back out to sea, and the rubber boat I was in was blown over, capsized. So, we hit the water, which is very cold. This is iceberg country down there. Just to give you some idea of how cold it was, the life belts we had were these kind you wore around like a belt, and you squeeze the cartridges. It had CO₂ cartridges, and they would inflate the belt. No one inflated his belt. You were just paralyzed instantly by the shock of that cold water. We had one man who, according to his service record book, had qualified as a swimmer, but he couldn't swim. In fact, we had to pull him over to hang onto this capsized rubber boat. We were picked up, oh, within five or ten minutes, but it was so cold that

we all ended up in the sickbay...

Daniels: Exposure?

Kerr: ...wrapped in blankets and sort of getting over the hypothermia, I guess. You wouldn't have lasted long in that water!

At any rate, we didn't know that we'd use this training at all, but this was kind of like our private yacht--the Feland--and we got to know all the crew, and it was a very well-run ship. You were treated much better than on an ordinary transport, and the quarters were much better.

So, anyhow, the time came for us to load up to go to Tarawa. Of course, we didn't know where we were going once again, but the word was that we were going on maneuvers on Hawkes Bay, New Zealand, up the coast. But everybody knew that was probably not true, which it wasn't. As we suited up in our camouflaged dungarees (chuckle) and all, we were not exactly going on a pleasure cruise. That was for sure!

So, we sailed up to Efate; that's one of the islands in the New Hebrides, and the harbor was called Vila Harbor. It's absolutely a beautiful spot, ringed around by mountains. It's probably the crater of an extinct volcano. We did a practice landing there in a coconut plantation, and the French planter came down. He invited us to come up on his porch and have a glass

of wine. We couldn't do that. But (chuckle) it was right out of, you know, your picture of the French planter. The ship comes around every two months with mail, and you send your children back to France to school as soon as they become of school age. The planter and his wife, if he has one, would go maybe every third or fourth year back to France for two or three months and then come back out again. I assume it was a profitable business. But, anyway, we had the maneuver. We saw a movie on the fantail--a beautiful night, moon shining, mountains all around--and it was one of the English comedians. It was a funny show. That was all very nice.

But then we took off from there, and we found out what the plan was and where we were going to land. We were given the maps--intelligence maps--which were very well-done, very detailed. When we arrived there, our battalion commander, Bill Jones--Willie K. Jones, as he was called--went over to the command ship to find out what our role would be, and we were advised that we were being held in corps reserve. There was an Army landing up at Makin, and another small force Marine landing at Apemama to the south. So, we were going to be held in corps reserve, and I think tears welled up in Bill Jones's eyes, you know: "Don't think that that was a reflection on us! We're the best unit in the

whole damn division!" Everybody was pretty upset about the idea, but I think that they had a reason. The principal reason was that they wanted us to be available wherever trouble might develop.

The naval officers in charge were greatly overconfident about the effect of the bombardment. I'm sure you've heard the story where one of them said that "I will personally escort you from one end of the island to the other. There won't be anything left after our bombardment."

Well, that didn't work. The high-velocity shells of those 14-inch guns, fired at pretty close range, would just skip over the island, you know. They would have been more effective if they'd moved them back out farther where the trajectory would have been different, and it could have done more damage to these fortifications. In any case, as we found out, it didn't do much damage at all.

The other debate that went on in Wellington about the operation, I later learned, came from Julian Smith, our commanding general, and the staff of the division. They felt very strongly that they should land on Bariki Island nearby and establish our artillery there to give close-in support. That should be done before the main landing. The admirals said they didn't have time, that the Japanese Navy was out, and this all

had to be done in a very short period of time. So, they couldn't add an extra day to the time of exposure.

The division also wanted to get additional Amtracs, so that all of the waves--not just the first two or three waves--could be mounted or placed in Amtracs for the landing, and you have some in reserve. The admirals said they didn't have time to wait for that, either. So, that's when that famous remark was made: "Our bombardment will be so effective that you'll be able to walk in. I will personally escort you from one area of the island to the other."

The other thing that had been allegedly said at that meeting was that General Smith--Julian Smith--said, "I want to remind you that the only thing that will be between the enemy and my troops is a khaki shirt," meaning, you know, that they were going in totally unprotected in this landing. So, I think the ground troops at least were not sold on the idea that this is going to be just a piece of cake, and it wasn't, of course. We could see out from our ship right away that things were not going well at all. They were dive-bombing places, calling strikes in, after all the areas being attacked should have been occupied. We were getting reports, also, over the radio as to what was going on. One area that they had not heard anything from was the 3rd Battalion of the 2nd

Regiment. I don't know about the direction, but looking at the landing beaches, the far right beach-- Beach Red 1, I guess it would be--they were landing there [pointing at the map]. Nothing had been heard. The battalion that landed was on this beach--Red 2--the 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marines, under Colonel Amey, who used to be with our battalion--and he was killed in the water--they had terrible casualties. Jim Crowe's battalion from the 8th Marines landed at Red 3, and if you look at the map, you'll see that that was by far the best beach to land on because it sloped around, so that you were protected on one side by the pier, and on the other there was no way you could get enfilade fire. Here, though, at Red 2, as you can see [pointing at the map], they were receiving fire from the pier--here and here and from here all across there.

Daniels: Crossfire.

Kerr: Crossfire. The same thing was true of this other battalion. However, Mike Ryan managed to take his company in boats--they were not in Amtracs--and maneuver over here to this point and come around, knock out the machine gun placement there, and get in in fairly good order.

Daniels: On Green Beach.

Kerr: On Green Beach. He was on Red 1, but then they were able to secure Green Beach by putting together an

offensive. He gathered what he could find. It was really about two or three companies only--or the remnants of two or three companies--and they attacked across here [pointing at map], across the beach.

Daniels: So, they came in at Red 1 and then swept across.

Kerr: They swept around here like that. So, we had a message from them--the first time we ever heard from them. Nobody thought they were there or that anybody was there, because the battalion commander had reported that he was unable to land, and he'd gone down here somewhere and landed. So, he didn't know anything, and he wasn't with his battalion. It was terrible confusion.

But at any rate, this was really the critical thing because after they were able to secure this end of the island, that meant that we could come in and be landed in rubber boats across the reef down here [pointing at map]. So, we inflated our boats and came in in good order. I mean, we had our battalion intact. We had very few casualties coming in, and we were able to float over these huge mines that they had planted down on the reef. They were as big as a small washtub in circumference and diameter, and they had big horn that came up. They'd sink a battleship. Well, I don't know if they could sink a battleship, but they'd sink a big ship, anyway. So, if you tried to come in with the

Amtracs there, you would have been blown up. We did have an Amtrak that tried to get through there, and it got blown up that night. We had thought the night before that all of these troops were just trapped along practically just...

Daniels: All the troops on Red 2 and Red 3.

Kerr: Yes. They were mainly stacked up behind this little seawall there. If you see the pictures, you'll see they're crowded in there. They were disorganized, and everybody was afraid that there would be a counterattack that would drive them off the island. If there had been, it would have driven them off the island, I think. Or, what if the Japanese had had mortars? They could have just slaughtered us.

Daniels: They didn't have mortars?

Kerr: They didn't have mortars for some reason. Nobody knows why. In any case, at midnight or late that night, after D Plus 1, we were very much afraid that we were going to be driven off the island. They told us to inflate our rubber boats, that we were going to make a landing that night with rubber boats down at this end of the island--Black Beach.

Daniels: On the east end. Black Beach?

Kerr: They called it Black Beach. They're not designated on this map, but they were on the other. Well, we knew that one would be a real disaster because at night it

would be very hard to know where you were and to keep organized, and we felt sure that we would have a hell of a time getting in. But they cancelled that, and the whole thing changed when they found out that the Green Beach had been, in effect, secured.

So, we landed anyway. We should have gotten there in the morning--that was the idea--and attacked immediately. But, as it turned out, they dumped us off our transport out to sea from the battleships. We passed a battleship while we were being towed in. Well, that delayed everything tremendously. The way you did it, you got in a boat, and you towed the rubber boats behind it. Then, when you got wherever you were going to go, you brought the rubber boats alongside and got in them and paddled your way on from there. So, the idea was that they would take us to the edge of the reef, and then we would get the rubber boats to paddle in. Well, the ship's officer who was in charge of our boat--I guess he was an ensign--I could tell he was absolutely terrified. You know, as you got closer to the island, you'd see all the firing going on, shooting, and smoke and fire, and, you know, it looked like you're headed for hell because you were!

Daniels: Right.

Kerr: But he tried to stop and let us off out a mile or two. I said, "No! You're taking us to the edge or the

reef!" "Oh, no!" I said, "Yes, you are!" I had a big .45-caliber cavalry revolver that an uncle who had been in World War I had given me, so I pulled it out, and I said, "You're going in!" So, we did go to the reef. This just shows the difference in the level of fear that you can have. To him this was the most dangerous thing he had ever been called on to do. To our people, of course, you were in great shape until you got ashore. You knew what it was going to be from the edge of the reef on in--you were getting in deeper and deeper trouble. But to him it was a really scary thing.

At any rate, we did go on in. We could paddle over those mines. Nobody told us about them, so we had to be rather careful. You didn't want to dip your paddle in too far because in very clear water you could float right over those things. So, we got in, and, of course, it was pretty disorganized. I was trying to find an officer who would be in charge of the troops and could tell me the situation there. So, I jumped into one shell hole, and, fortunately, there were Marines in it. I said, "Do you know where the officer in charge would be?" He said, "I don't know." He said, "I think there's an officer over in that next shell hole over there." So, I went over and jumped in that one, and there was a man in there with his arm in

a sling. He looked a little more mature than some of the others, and I said, "Are you an officer?" He said, "Yes, I'm an officer." He said, "I'm the dentist."

Daniels: (Chuckle) The dentist! What was he doing there?

Kerr: Well, there you had a dentist, you know, to take care of...you have a battalion surgeon and a dentist that landed to wire people up, you know, when they get shot or injured in their mouths and jaws. But, of course, he would normally not have been in there at that stage of a landing, but everything got all mixed up.

So, I never did see Ryan. We knew that he had been in charge of these guys. Bill Jones found him the next morning. We didn't find anybody in charge. That night bombs were dropped on us by Japanese planes, and we had some casualties from that. We had one or two hand-to-hand fights. The Japanese would jump in some bomb crater and then come out. You couldn't see anything! I heard this tremendous commotion going on in the crater near the one I was in, and I didn't know who was there and who was getting the best of it. You couldn't really tell with all the yelling and everything. Finally, I heard a little American cussing going on (chuckle), and I realized it was this Corporal Orr, the same one I told you about on Guadalcanal who helped me bring these guys in. That

man's name, incidentally, on Guadalcanal--that I couldn't think of--was Seiler. Anyway, there were still Japanese around; they weren't all obliterated by our fire.

Daniels: So, it was nighttime, and you guys were just essentially in your crater.

Kerr: We were just in there.

Daniels: In the craters, in the pillboxes.

Kerr: So, when it got dawn, you could see where you were. Jones found Ryan, and we got organized. The plan was that we would move up here to this point. There where these guns they called "Singapore Guns," turret-mounted at this point. Actually, they were not "Singapore Guns" as it turned out, but they were large 4- or 5-inch guns.

Daniels: So, this landing had all taken place at night.

Kerr: Well, we got in in late afternoon, but it was dark by the time we actually got ashore and got in.

Daniels: So, when you went over the reefs, there was still some light.

Kerr: There was still light, yes.

Daniels: So, you could see the mines.

Kerr: We could see the mines. There was still light when we got ashore. We just couldn't find anybody.

Daniels: Okay. Were you the senior officer in this group that hit Green Beach?

Kerr: Well, I was the company executive officer of A Company. The other companies were here in various places, too. I didn't know exactly where anybody was all that night.

So, as our plan of attack, as Jones had told us aboard ship, we were going to attack in a column of companies and a column of platoons. In other words, that would mean, in effect, you'd have a one-platoon front, and as soon as anybody has slowed down or whatever, the unit behind them just goes automatically, just passes through. We were going to go barrel-ass down the island. That was our instructions.

Daniels: Since you were going down the south side of the island.

Kerr: Yes, right along the south side--I guess the south side between the airstrip and the water. Our first objective was to find a group of Marines from the 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marines, who had crossed the airstrip and were in a tank trap somewhere in here [pointing at map].

Daniels: Sort of on the west end of the airstrip.

Kerr: Yes. They had not been able to get out of there. I mean, they were just sort of trapped in the place. Aboard ship Jones had said, "I'm going to have the reserve company go first." That's C Company. They all looked a little paler.

Daniels: (Chuckle)

Kerr: He said, "Who's got the reserve platoon in C Company?" And this guy held his hand up. He said, "Okay, you'll

be in the front. We'll go C, A, and B--in that order." So, "Durf" was the company commander of A Company, I was the company exec, and then C Company was leading. Joe Golding was C Company commander, and he was a nice guy, a black Irishman, but sort of clumsy, you know. He was the sort of guy that things always seemed to happen to.

So, the idea was just to go charging down this row of fortifications. There was a lot more than...this just shows the larger weapons, but this was a whole interconnected series of bunkers, concrete mostly, and they had logs over the top, and then they had sand over the top of that--several feet of sand--so that these shells would just come in on a flat trajectory and skip right over this stuff. But they were so arranged where they could support one another.

[Tape 2, Side 2]

Daniels: Okay. So, they arranged to support one another.

Kerr: So, what you had to do was to take them under fire--the ones immediately that you were attacking plus ones that could support it with fire--and then send up your demolitions people. They had to crawl up under this bunker, and you had your flamethrowers, and they would toss this satchel charge of explosives inside the bunker; and they would use flamethrowers and shoot them in through the openings into the bunker. The flames

didn't really burn people up. What they did, though, was burn up all the oxygen inside, so these guys would either suffocate, or they would run out because you had a sudden flame that just went in there and sucked up or destroyed all the oxygen. So, whatever it was, they would either be killed by the explosives or by the flamethrowers.

You had to have a lot of teamwork, though, to be able to do that. We had borrowed a medium tank from Ryan--the only one left that was really operative--and it would go along this strip. It had a 75-millimeter cannon, and you would use that to fire at these bunkers, too, from behind. So, they made good progress. Golding, as I said, was sort of an amiable, fairly awkward guy. He was running along, holding a rifle with a bayonet on the end of it, and they shot the flamethrower in one of these things, and these guys came out just, you know, helter-skelter, blindly, and one of them impaled himself on Golding's bayonet (chuckle). After that he was called "Judo Joe."

Daniels: (Laughter) Because somebody ran onto his bayonet.

Kerr: Anyway, at some point along here, we passed through--A Company passed through. I guess that's where we found the tank trap with these men in it. Then we passed through C Company, and we were then the lead company, with B Company behind us and C Company behind them.

As we went through this tank trap, all these men in there were hollow-eyed. You could see how shaken they were. They said, "Don't go! Don't go! Don't go out there! Don't go out there!" They would say that as we passed through. They were just really terrified. I guess they'd been stuck there. But we went on through, and we moved along pretty well. We got all the way down somewhere in this area. There was a big tank trap.

Daniels: On that little island toward the east end of the airstrip.

Kerr: Well, we were pretty far down the airstrip, but this front, as you can see from this map, widens at this point. Futhermore, we had good many casualties along the way, and the company commander of B Company--they were not out in front--he got shot through the neck and was paralyzed. So, that company was taken over by the executive officer. It was decided, anyway, that they would move B Company up, and we would prepare a defensive position--a strong defensive position. We'd have C Company in reserve; that was the idea. But, we wanted to stop because it takes time, to get organized, to get all the machine guns sited, and we would have liked to put out wire. We really wanted to be prepared because you knew that this was a good chance that you would have a banzai attack at night. So, I was the one

in communication with Jones and told him I thought we ought to stop. We couldn't get to that tank trap before dark, anyway, so this was as good a place as any. He said, "Yeah, I agree," and we moved B Company in and all that. Then he called and reported back to regiment, and they said, "Keep going!" Which was a big mistake!

Daniels: Why?

Kerr: I don't know. I guess they were so elated because they hadn't been able to do anything over here, and we'd gone practically two-thirds of the way down the island at this point.

So, we continued, but the heat was just intense. This island is smack-dab on the equator, and it was very hot. You had all these burning fires of one type or another: equipment burning, ammunition dumps, fuel dumps, smoke and flames. So, the heat was almost unbearable, and people were getting dehydrated, getting heat exhaustion, which was another reason for stopping at this point. But we had people out front. B Company had not really got very well deployed. They had some confusion with the new company commander, who was a little shaky.

So, we didn't have a good defensive position established. About that time we got a message that they had sighted Japanese troops massing down here for

a counterattack. So, there we were. It was now almost dark, and right in front of our company position there were these burning trucks, and we had some people out in front of these burning trucks. The flames from the trucks would silhouette them or anyone else-- particularly them if they got up or moved around. The light was behind them, so we wanted to pull them back in, and we wanted to get all the machine guns lined up. So, I sent people out to bring in the people we had out there. Some of them were alive; some of them were wounded. They brought them in, and it was pretty hard to do. I mean, it's not an easy job to find them and bring them in with all the shooting that was going on.

But they came back and said that there was this one man, and he had insisted that they leave him alone, that he got a terrible wound. Half of his insides were shot out. He was a BAR man. He'd been in my platoon, and I said, "Oh, God! I don't want to leave him out there! We're going to be calling in artillery and everything else!" They said, "Well, he'd never make it! You'd never get him here, and he said he wants to stay there with his BAR and kill as many of the Japs as he could." This is one part of the story that is so hard for me to tell.

Daniels: Who was this man?

Kerr: His name was Glenn White. So, we did get the machine

guns in--the heavies from the Battalion Weapons Company--and our lights. The idea is, you set up where you have enfilade or crossfire across your front.

Daniels: So, they changed your mind and allowed you guys to dig in?

Kerr: Oh, yes. They said, "Prepare to resist a counterattack." You know, that's swell [facetious comment]--just one hour late! B Company had not gotten their positions well-organized at all.

Daniels: Who's the commander of B Company at this point?

Kerr: Well, I'd rather not say.

Daniels: Fine. That's all right.

Kerr: I'm not going to...

Daniels: No problem.

Kerr: He was all right. He was later killed. But he kind of panicked, frankly. He called in Jones, the battalion commander, and said, "I don't think we can hold! We can't hold!" So, Jones called me and said, "What's the situation?" He said he'd had this call, and I said that I didn't think it was all that bad. He said, "Well, could you see if you can find him and talk to him? Go over there." Well, you know, that's a lot of fun to do that!

Daniels: Yes.

Kerr: But, anyway, I did finally find him, and he was obviously was sort of really, terribly shaken. But at

this point, we were pretty well-organized, but in between our positions and theirs was not very well covered at all.

Daniels: Between yours and B Company?

Kerr: Yes. So, I was worried about that, and I called back to Jones. I said, "Why don't we get a platoon from C Company to come up and fill in here, because I don't think that they've got it very well covered." He said, "No". He said, "They took C Company away from us and sent them across the island." So, we had no reserve company. So, things were not too great at that point. We were short on belted ammunition for the machine guns. We wanted to have two boxes of belted ammunition issued per gun at a minimum, and the officer from the Battalion Weapons Company who was in charge of the machine guns--a fellow named Hugh Fricks, who was a very fine officer, a great guy--showed up, and he was going around checking on the machine guns and making sure that they were all properly set up and whatnot. We found him dead the next morning.

Daniels: Fricks?

Kerr: Yes. He was killed while he was doing that. We didn't know it. We didn't know who had been killed or hadn't been killed.

So, the Japanese made a couple of attacks, but they were obviously not the main attack--at least I say

obviously. We realized that they weren't the main attack. So, Jones had decided to send a mortar squad down as infantryman. This fellow "Spook" Specht, who is here--Lyle Specht--was in charge of that group.

So, he shows up down at our command post, which was at the shell hole by the airstrip. He said, "You know, we don't have any bayonets on our carbines. They don't have a lug to mount a bayonet, so we're not going to be in very good shape to fight close hand-to-hand-type combat." I said, "Well, I know." I got a runner to show them the way--it was dark by then--to fill in down there.

Oh, anyway, the night would go along, and they would yell stuff, you know. They would yell, "Corpsman! Corpsman!" trying to get you to send somebody out. A lot of them spoke English very well--most of them. But our people really did very well because they had been instructed not to fire a weapon unless it was a real full-scale banzai attack. They would fire mortar shells and throw hand grenades, but to hold off firing and, for God's sake, don't fire your automatic weapon! We didn't want them to know where the machine guns were positioned because they'd try to knock them out.

So, finally...I don't know what time it was. The night went on and on. Around 2:00 or 3:00 they did

make the major attack--the banzai attack.

Daniels: At night.

Kerr: At night. They always did it at night. We fought in daytime; they fought at night. So, nobody got any rest. At any rate, our machine guns and Browning automatic rifles were all positioned for enfilade fire, and we called in everything we could call in: naval gunfire, artillery. They had now landed some artillery pieces down back on Beach Green, so we could bring that fire in. The destroyers offshore could fire across there, and we had all our mortars going, and we were bringing the fire up very close to the line because that's where the Japanese were. Of course, I sat there realizing that White was right where we were calling in artillery and bombs and everything else. So, it was a tough thing to think about.

When dawn came, in the front of our company area we counted over three hundred dead Japanese. We had a good many casualties, too, but you didn't realize it until you went around and brought bodies in. See, they were bringing them all into a little clearing there--a lot of your friends and companions. And that's the difficult thing.

Daniels: Yes, sir.

Kerr: Anyway, the 3rd Battalion, 6th Marines, passed through us the next morning and went on down to the other end

of the island against light resistance. That was really the end--with that banzai attack. These people took huge casualties, but they didn't really figure into the end of the real battle for the island as it turned out. I'm sure they killed a lot of Japanese over there, though.

Daniels: So, in your sweep along the southern edge here, you cleared all this area here?

Kerr: We didn't, but they were able to at that point.

Daniels: Who? The people coming in?

Kerr: The people over here, yes.

Daniels: So, once you came down along the south edge, then the north edge managed to move them off the beach.

Kerr: It pretty well collapsed over there.

Daniels: Okay. So, they attacked at 2:00 in the morning, and you broke that. So, that was basically the end of massive resistance.

Kerr: I don't know where these Japanese came from. I suppose they could have come from over here [pointing at the map], or they could have come from anywhere. But after that they evacuated these units, which had taken very heavy casualties.

Daniels: Along Red 2 and Red 3.

Kerr: Yes. They put them back aboard ship. We had the whole 6th Regiment because we were the only part of it--our battalion--that had taken heavy casualties. We didn't

have the kind of casualties like they did over there.

But the word was that some of the Japanese had waded across to another island and had gone up...they figured they'd gone up to the other islands. This atoll was sort of like a big crescent. Here is Betio [pointing at map]. So, they had gone here, and nobody knew where they had gone up from there.

So, I took a patrol over. I don't know how far up I went with this patrol, but it was really just a reconnaissance patrol. There was one kind of amusing thing. There hadn't been any fighting along here at all these other islands. But we were going through as a line of skirmishers, you know, with the rifles and all that and saw some movements. It was a native. So, I tried to speak pidgin English to him and asked him if he had seen any Japanese, you know, using some gestures or whatever. He said, "Oh, no!" He said, "They've all taken to the bush!" He said it in perfect English (chuckle)!

Daniels: (Laughter) I guess he told you!

Kerr: (Laughter) So, a lot of them spoke very good English. This had been an English possession. They had a Catholic mission school there on the atoll somewhere.

We stopped that night, and the natives built a big bonfire, and they performed dances. It was really great! I mean, it was real Polynesian culture. It was

not the fake stuff that you see now. Then we went on back and reported that they had gone on, but the natives had seen them, all right. They estimated the number at about maybe 100 or 150, but they had all gone on up. So, the guess was that they were going up to the tip...

Daniels: The northern tip.

Kerr: ...thinking maybe that they'd get picked up by a submarine or something. So, a company from the 3rd Battalion, 6th Marines--maybe more than company strength--landed farther up and went up and had a battle with these survivors. There were maybe fifteen or twenty Marines killed in that and all the Japanese, of course. Every one of these atolls was an Alamo for the Japanese. There were no surrenders.

Daniels: No surrenders?

Kerr: No. The only people who really surrendered were people who were unconscious from wounds and didn't know what they were doing or Korean laborers.

Anyway, that was the end of that, and we were told we were going back to Hawaii. We were all pretty exhausted. Nobody had had anything to eat. Hot. Dirty. I guess we were sort of shell-shocked from all of this.

Daniels: Did they make you guys bury the dead?

Kerr: Yes. We had to wrap them up in ponchos and tag them.

They had built a cemetery over across the island there, and we had to take them over. The burial detail usually was the burial officer, who was the division legal officer. In the Marines everybody had a job, you know. It didn't make any difference. When you went in combat, you had to do something. The bandsmen were the stretcher bearers, and some of the other headquarters people did the burial. So, they picked up the bodies and took them over there.

We got aboard ship, and it was very crowded. We'd come there on the Feland, which had been very pleasant, but we went back on the Hayward. They had a skipper who'd assembled a boxing team. He got on the horn and said, "All you tough Marines! We're going to have a smoker tonight on the after deck, and we challenge you to boxing matches!" Well, you know, nobody was interested in that, but they sat up a ring back there, and he had all these guys who had obviously been professional boxers. Most of them were black boxers, but there were some white guys, and they all were equipped. They had satin trunks and all that stuff and were dancing around the ring. People would volunteer to fight them.

This sergeant I had, named Clougherty, was a guy that I may have mentioned earlier. Everytime he'd go on liberty, he would pick a fight with some sailor

somewhere. He was a real barroom fighter, but he was not a very big guy and not a very scientific boxer. But, anyway, I was standing by him, and he said, "I'll fight the son-of-a-bitch!" I said, "Oh, you don't want to do that! Those guys are pros!" He said, "I don't care!" So, he got up, took his shirt off, and all he had was his dungaree trousers on, and he put on gloves. His opponent was dancing around, stretching around the ring, you know, shadow boxing and whatnot. So, they started to fight, and Clougherty went out and just put his hands up like that (gesture) and didn't do much. He just stood there like John L. Sullivan or somebody. This guy would pepper him, you know, and try to hit him. Clougherty didn't do much of anything except just defend himself, and then he went through the second round pretty much like the first round. It was only going to be a three-round fight. He said, "Okay!" He said, "I've been saving up for this guy!" He said, "I'm ready to go now!" (chuckle)

Daniels: (Chuckle)

Kerr: I guess he knew he couldn't wear himself out trying to box with the guy, so he went out the same way. The guy comes out, and he is really overconfident now. Clougherty reached way back and really let him have it, you know, and knocked him completely out of the ring (laughter). So, we won that one (laughter).

Daniels: (Laughter) That's great!

Kerr: Anyway, we landed at Hilo. We just had this vision of Honolulu and Diamond Head and all that stuff--all we had seen in the movies. We had not seen anything of Hilo in the movies. We landed there, and they loaded us in these trucks. Not only that, the whole town was boarded up; you didn't see a soul. We found out later that they had been told that Marines were killers, and they'd kill anyone of Japanese descent. A lot of these were Japanese people. They didn't know we weren't looking for a fight with anybody! We went on the trucks. It was over sixty miles around and about, and we finally ended up on the Parker Ranch. It looked like West Texas. It was a pretty cold, windy place--no camp. The truck stopped, and they said, "Here you are!"

So, we got out and Colonel Lloyd--"Whitey" Lloyd--was now the regimental commander. He was the big fellow I told you about earlier. He was a very emotional guy. He just couldn't believe that there was no camp, and he expressed himself fully about that.

Daniels: (Chuckle) Fully! That's a nice way to put it.

Kerr: Well, he took his helmet off. One of his favorite tricks, when he was really upset, was to take his steel helmet off and throw it on the ground (chuckle), you know, real hard. Well, anyway, despite of all that,

there we were. So, we made little tents, you know, with shelter halves and spent the night.

Daniels: You didn't have any doghouses?

Kerr: No doghouses! No nothing!

Daniels: (Chuckle)

Kerr: But General Smith--Julian Smith--flew over to Pearl Harbor and talked to Admiral Nimitz, and in a matter just of days we had all the materials in the world for a complete camp--tents, floorboards, temporary Quonset huts--all the works.

Daniels: When was this? When you were arriving in Hilo?

Kerr: This was out at the camp.

Daniels: What time is this?

Kerr: Well, it would be in December.

Daniels: Of 1943.

Kerr: Yes. So, about this time--we'd only been there a couple of weeks or so--I was called to go up to see Colonel Shoup, who was now the chief of staff of the division. He was a rather gruff fellow, and he said, "Well, you got a great assignment!" I said, "What's that?" "Well, you have been selected to go as observer on the next operation." And I said, "When will that be?" He said, "Well, you leave today!"

Daniels: (Chuckle) Just you personally?

Kerr: Yes. He handed me this big book--practically--and these were all the questions and things that I was to

report on--aboard ship and then the landing and everything else. I was to observe how these things worked, what was done well and what wasn't, what needed to be improved-- that sort of thing. He said, "They'll try to put you back on about the tenth or the eleventh wave, but that way you won't be able to see a damn thing! So, you tell them you don't want to be later than the third wave." I said, "Yes, sir!"

Daniels: (Chuckle) Gee, thanks!

Kerr: So, anyway, they took me down to Hilo, and I got on a destroyer and went out to a transport. I found out that the battalion I had been assigned to land with was to--and I did land in the second or third wave; I've forgotten which--land on an island next to the islands where the main attack was going to be. That was Roi and Namur at the top end of Kwajalein atoll. That's in the Marshalls. Roi was one island, and the next island to it was Namur. We were landing on an island next to Namur, called Ennemanit. I boarded a destroyer at Hilo and we went out to the troop transports, which were all standing at Lahaina Roads, which is sort of an anchorage area off of Maui. The battalion I joined and the entire 4th Marine Division were straight from the States. They had not had any battle experience at all; they had not been in any engagement. Several of the officers of this battalion, when I joined them for

dinner that evening, were people I had known in officer school back in Philadelphia. The fact that I had been in a couple of operations made me an old veteran, and they wanted to hear all about it and so forth.

Frankly, I was not psychologically ready to go on another landing that appeared to be, perhaps, just like the Tarawa landing, but I had to put on a brave face, anyway, and act not too concerned about it. Things were not helped any by one of these guys that I had known before, who was sort of a little smart aleck. He said, "Well, you've been on two of these landings so far. This will be your third." He said, "You know, the odds are going to catch up with you pretty soon, aren't they?" I said, "No, that's not the way it is." I said, "On this landing my odds are the same as yours --no better, no worse. Maybe mine are a little better because I know a little more about how to take care of myself." But, of course, there is another set of odds --you don't want to talk about that--and that is, if you roll a dice so many times, sooner or later you're going to throw boxcars, you know. It's true--each time you throw them, the odds are exactly the same. Anyhow, I thought the conditions aboard this transport were the worst I had ever seen.

Daniels: Which transport was this?

Kerr: I don't know the name of it. I've forgotten. APA 7 or

something. My instructions were that I had to tell the commanding officer of any unit that I was going to criticize. I had to advise him of that. So, I went to see the captain. I was a captain in the Marine Corps, and he was a full captain in the Navy. So, I was just a little bit nervous about that, and I told him that I had thought that some of my responses were going to be critical of some of the conditions aboard the transport, and I thought I was obligated to let him know that. Well, he went all to pieces. He didn't yell at me or get mad. He just said, "Oh, don't do that!" and so forth. So, I toned it down as much as I could, but the truth of the matter is that this is one of the things I felt that they really needed to improve on. The men had to live under such conditions that they were really in no condition to do anything. It didn't do any good to get them all in good shape physically before you go if you spend a week or two on board a ship. And they were in terrible shape!

Daniels: What conditions were they subjected to?

Kerr: Well, you're sailing there in equatorial waters. It's very hot, and the air conditioning didn't work. It wasn't real air conditioning. The circulation system didn't work. There'd be holes in the conduits that'd been there for I don't know how long. Some guy maybe poked a hole in there so he could get more air, but

that's something they could do something about and fix. They would not let the men go topside and sleep up on the deck even though it was just hotter than Hades. It was just a hellhole down there! These ships--and this was typical of the way they were built--were converted from a merchant, sort of, transport, and the troops' quarters were right down next to the engine room. They were very deep in the ship, and there was very little air. It was hot, miserable conditions.

The ship's crew--and this was not too unusual--hated to have troops on board. They had a nice, comfortable routine when they didn't have any troops on board, and that just complicated their lives. They had to feed them, and they had them all over the place. So, they resented it, and I thought that this is one thing that the commanding officers of a transport ought to be able to drill into the minds and attitudes of their crew. This is their job, and they ought to be trying to take care of the troops as best as they can because that's the way you should measure their performance. If you've got a bad attitude on part of the crew, well, then they're not doing their job. I felt that that was up to the commanding officer of the ship and his other officers to make sure they understood that. And, I will say, that wasn't the only ship where that was true. This was fairly typical of

the transports. Usually, the skipper of a transport was a guy who either had come out of the merchant marine or was a Naval Academy product who felt that his career had been thwarted since he had been assigned to be skipper of a transport. He didn't look at that as any great opportunity for him to make a good record for himself. And that's just absolutely wrong. You ought to be trying to run the very best transport in the fleet, not just feel that you are being taken advantage of and that this is a lousy deal and you shouldn't have been assigned that duty. But that, I felt, was an important point to make in my report. So, I did make it and did tell him, and I don't know if it ever created any problems for him. But I don't even know if anybody ever read my report, for that matter.

Anyway, they changed a lot of things that they needed to change that hadn't been done at Tarawa. They had everybody equipped or landed in amtracs; they had an underwater demolition team that went down and cleared the wire on the reef and cleared a pass through the coral; they landed this artillery on the adjoining islands where they could set up and cover the landing with close-in artillery fire. Those were a big improvement.

They tried a few other things, but it sort of didn't work out too well--bright ideas somebody had.

One seemed like a good idea, but it just didn't work out. They equipped a boat with all kinds of explosives, with a tremendous amount of explosives on it, that could be detonated by radio--remote-controlled--and it could be guided by remote control. The idea was to lay down a smoke screen and send this drone boat--unmanned boat--and run it up on the shore and detonate it. It seemed like a good idea. So, we were all out there in a small boat, watching to see how the experiment worked out. The drone disappeared into the smoke screen, and everybody was waiting for the big explosion. Nothing happened! Nothing happened! Then you were beginning to wonder if maybe it failed to explode or the detonation equipment didn't work. All of a sudden, out of the smoke screen came the drone, headed back right toward (chuckle) everybody else. I don't know what happened with the control, but that scared everyone half to death when this thing was headed for you, and here are all these other boats around. At any rate, they managed to get some guys to go alongside, and they went on there and disconnected the controls. But that didn't work!

The other thing that backfired more seriously was that they had a new kind of explosives. This plastic explosive was very exponentially more powerful than dynamite or the stuff we had before, and you could slap

it up on a tank or on a building or something like that and then detonate it. You had to get off at a distance and detonate it, just like the IRA [Irish Republican Army] does things these days. Anyway, on the main island they saw this big concrete building, so they figured that had to be the command post or the headquarters--just like the pictures they had seen at Tarawa. So, the demolitions guys go in with these plastic explosives and slap a whole ton of it on it, and then they go back and detonate it. You had the darnedest explosion you can imagine--just a huge explosion--because this building contained not the headquarters, but was a storehouse for torpedo warheads. It created a huge crater. I mean, a really big crater. I think maybe three hundred men were killed in this explosion.

Daniels: Americans?

Kerr: Yes! That's where most of the casualties were--from this explosion. Actually, the fighting was modest.

Daniels: So, the Americans were around the building?

Kerr: If you were anywhere near it! I was on this adjoining island and was knocked flat on my back. There was an airplane flying over that had a correspondent in it. It wasn't Ernie Pyle, but it was one of these well-known newspaper columnists, Raymond Clapper, I believe. It blew that plane out of the air and killed him and the

pilot. They were flying at about 1,500 feet or something.

Daniels: Was this something that is known?

Kerr: I don't know that it is. They didn't publicize their mistakes very much during the war.

Daniels: Well, they wouldn't do that, but I think it would have come out afterwards.

Kerr: It probably came out that this man was killed, that his plane was knocked down, you know, or shot down. I don't think they ever disclosed what had actually happened there.

The other bad thing about it--this was just typical of fresh troops--is that every wave that hit the island would immediately start firing away, and, you know, if you're in one of the earlier waves, you had to get down on the ground flat because these birds were firing madly away. They didn't know what they were shooting at.

Daniels: So, if you were 100 feet in and the new wave came in, they started shooting at you.

Kerr: Yes. Well, everybody would yell, "Hit the deck! Fire in the hole!" So, you'd get down. But they really had very light resistance, actually. I don't know how many troops they had stationed there--the Japanese--and why it wasn't a more hard-fought thing than it was. But it wasn't. What appeared to be another Tarawa on paper

actually turned out to be a fairly easy operation. Down at the other end where the Army landed, I don't know anything about why it took them as long as it did to secure that. They must have had maybe more resistance or whatever, but it took them about a week or so to finally clear it up.

[Tape 3, Side 1]

Kerr: I think the Japanese forces at Kwajalein were primarily people who were there to service the submarines. It was used as a submarine base. They were supply and administrative forces primarily. At Tarawa you had the Special Naval Landing Forces, which were really the elite fighting force that the Japanese had.

Daniels: So, you ran into...

Kerr: We ran into the equivalent of the Marines.

Daniels: At Tarawa.

Kerr: At Tarawa. Number one, on Kwajalein I don't think that they had that kind of force. Number two, the islands were certainly not nearly as well-fortified or protected.

Daniels: Pillboxes, bunkers, and that sort of thing.

Kerr: They didn't have much of that. I don't know what was down at the other end of the island. There might have been more and better defenders than they had out there. But, in any case, it was not a another Tarawa by any means--thank goodness!

Daniels: Right.

Kerr: I had an attack of malaria while I was there.

Daniels: On the island?

Kerr: On the beach, yes. Of course, those guys had never seen anybody with malaria before. But I managed to get out on a hospital boat and get some quinine.

Then we had to sort of fend for ourselves as to how to get back to Pearl Harbor. There were two other observers there besides myself, so we sort of got together. There was a command ship; that was the first one of these. We'd never heard of such a thing. That was one of the new innovations. They had this ship, really a beautiful, big ship, and it had all kinds of communications gear. You'd just see all of these antennas and receiving and transmitting equipment, and that's where you had the command group ensconced there, where they had absolutely great communications with the landing forces as well as others.

Daniels: So, communications were a lot better than on Tarawa.

Kerr: Oh, yes, far better. Well, mainly, they just didn't have the resistance.

Daniels: Well, to my understanding, you lost a lot of the radios on the way into Tarawa.

Kerr: Yes, we did. And the radios were not all that great, anyway.

Anyway, we went out and got a boat to take us out to that command ship. Somebody told us that would be the best place to try to arrange for transportation. So, we went up the ladder, and the officer-of-the-deck saluted us and piped us aboard (chuckle). We were a pretty ratty-looking crowd, as you can imagine, and he said, "Would you like to get something to eat?" We said, "We sure would!" He said, "Well, let's go along to the wardroom!" So, we went into this beautiful wardroom. I mean, that was really something! First class! He said, "You can have anything you like." He said, "We got ice cream, we got whatever else." When he mentioned ice cream, you know, that really hit the spot. So, they brought out a one of these tubes or cartons of ice cream that you see in a place where you dip the ice cream out of it. I still had a high fever, and that really cooled me down pretty well. Really, nothing ever tasted better than that.

Daniels: Whose ship was this?

Kerr: Well, I guess it had the senior naval officer in charge from the Navy, and it probably had Holland Smith or whoever was the "big cheese."

Daniels: Holland Smith?

Kerr: Holland M. Smith. We didn't see anybody like that, but the officer there checked around and arranged for us to fly on a PBY down to the other end of the atoll because

we could get better transportation there. Admiral McCain--"Jock" McCain--the father of the U.S. senator of Arizona now-- was a well-known admiral in naval aviation. He was heading back from Kwajalein to Pearl Harbor, and he gave us a ride in his plane. We landed at Tarawa enroute and refueled there. It was interesting to see how it had changed in just that short period of time. Unbelievable! You'd never know. You would never have known what all had gone on there. So, I went back to Honolulu and wrote my report.

Daniels: What did your report say?

Kerr: Well, I just reported on all of the things that had happened and some things that I thought worked, some of the things that didn't, some of the things that were an improvement. You know, you just had a long, long checklist to cover. I turned it in and went back to my unit. I got back there, and I was going to stay at division headquarters. I wasn't going to go back to my unit. I said, "Well, I'd really like to go back to my unit." Colonel Shoup said, "Well, I don't care." He said, "I've got something else for you to do." (Chuckle) He didn't tell me what it was right off, and I didn't know exactly what I was supposed to do. So, I was assigned, I think, to Division Operations staff at that point--to Three or maybe to Four, which was Logistics. In every staff you have One, Two, Three,

and Four. One is Administration Personnel, Two is Intelligence, Three is Operations, Four is Logistics. He then explained that he wanted to work out a system on future landings that would avoid some of the problems that we had had at Tarawa. He had been the senior officer in command ashore at Tarawa--he got the Congressional Medal of Honor--so he was very familiar with what some of the problems were and the confusion, the lack of communications, and all that. They had developed the idea where they would have at each of the landing beaches--or series of landing beaches--what was called a logistic control officer, a LCO. He would be in a small PC, patrol boat, and have direct communications with each of the battalions, the landing teams--the commanding officer of that--and he would have a troop transport quartermaster rather, an officer, who had the loading plan of every ship in the convoy. You would also have a floating supply of the things that you would be likely to need in the very early stages right there at this patrol boat, and it would only be maybe 1,000 yards or 1,500 yards offshore. So, you're right off the beach. You had direct communications with the people who were making the assault; you had direct communications with the division headquarters and direct communications with all the ships and also with the aircraft control

officer of the supporting aircraft. I remember my code name was "Bismuth." I thought that was a great name.

Daniels: (Chuckle) Why did you need a code name?

Kerr: Well, to communicate in the clear.

Daniels: I see.

Kerr: Everybody had a code name. "Hello, Popcorn! This is Bismuth! Can you hear me?" Anybody listening in wouldn't know who you were, although they might have a guess.

The boats coming in for the landing would rendezvous and establish the line on the logistics control boat. As the casualties were brought back from ashore, the coxswain would be told where to take him. He would report to the LCO, and then he would be told where to go--which hospital. They had all these hospital ships. That was one of the innovations. They had LSTs converted into hospital ships with operating rooms and the whole works. If you needed something that was not readily available, you knew which ship to call and tell them to send it in and tell them where to send it. So, all it did, the system really was designed just to short-circuit going through the whole chain of command; whereas, a company commander would go to the battalion, the battalion would go to the regiment, the regiment would go to the division, and then the division would come back. All that takes a

lot of time, and a lot of times you can't make those contacts. Your radio reception is not all that great from the battalion ashore. So, he had in mind that I would be one of the LCOs, and we would develop this system. Practically the whole time I was back at Hawaii after the observer experience, we would go out aboard ship working out the procedures and getting used to how you do it.

Daniels: Where were you stationed during this period?

Kerr: I was stationed up at the division headquarters--at the same camp but not with my unit.

Daniels: On Hilo.

Kerr: On the island of Hawaii. I was really wanting to go back to my unit, frankly, because all the people I really knew--my friends--were there.

Daniels: They were still there.

Kerr: They were still there at the camp. So, one day, I was sitting in the room in this headquarters, and the wall was very thin. You could hear a lot of things going on in the other offices. I heard the commanding officer of the 6th Marines--at this point Colonel Riseley--come in. He was a full colonel, also. He said to Shoup, "Dave, you got our man up here. I want him back! What are you doing with him, anyway? You don't need him up here. Ray Murray [He was one of the battalion commanders.] wants him back for his

operations officer in the battalion." So, it got a little heated, and Shoup just said, "I'll tell you what he's doing! He's working! And he's staying here!" So, my fate was being determined without my having, of course, obviously any say-so in it.

So, I stayed on then, and the next landing was at Saipan; and that was a huge operation. I mean, you had Guam, Saipan, and Tinian. They were all going to be taken. You had this enormous armada of ships. It was a sight to see at Pearl Harbor that you can't imagine! There were at least three Marine divisions, reinforced. There were two or three Army divisions. Then there were all of the troops that went along with them: carriers, battleships, everything. The procedure at that point was, you had then what they called a "fast carrier task force." That would be your fast carriers, your fast battleships, and your fast cruisers and destroyers--literally fast. I mean, they could travel fast. They were all capable of high speeds in the thirty-knot range. They would go out first, and they'd make a strike at the target that you were aiming for, but also any other targets in the general area that might be in a position of support. Their objective would be to destroy any aircraft on the ground, hangars, aircraft facilities primarily. That would be their main function. Then this task force would have

the "OBBS"--the old battleships--and these were the slower ones, and they were along for shore bombardment. They were just like artillery. And you had the cruisers and so forth. With a fast carrier task force, you had a lot of fast destroyers and cruisers for protection, plus the fast battleships. So, we left Pearl Harbor, and we were aboard ship thirty days.

Daniels: When did you leave Pearl?

Kerr: Well, it must have been about late May or middle of May because we landed on the 15th of June, I think. So, anyway, we landed at Saipan. Our landing beaches were on the left side of the group. The main objective was a town called Charan Kanoa. There was a big sugar mill there. The Japanese had developed Saipan and Tinian agriculturally. They raised sugar cane, and they had modern facilities, a mill. They had two fairly good-sized towns--Garapan and another one. I can't think of the name. They had banks, telephones, telegraph offices. It was a very impressive thing. As you pulled out along off the island, you could look through the glasses and see what was there. It had pretty much a flat plain, and then it rose up to a high mountain in the center of the island--Topatchau. It really sort of dominated the island. It was a big island. I forgot how big. It was over, I think, thirty or thirty-five miles long and ten or fifteen

miles wide.

So, our troops went in there after the usual bombardment and all the rest, but they started receiving artillery fire right away. The Japanese had a lot of troops there. They had about 35,000 or 40,000 troops. It was the headquarters of their whole Pacific area.

Daniels: These were topnotch troops?

Kerr: Yes. They had Lieutenant General Yoshitsugo Saito as the commanding general; they had Nagumo, the commanding admiral of the navy. They were all headquartered there. There were a lot of Japanese civilians in these islands--probably a population of 40,000 or 50,000 civilians. Then you had the natives--the Chamorros. So, there were a lot of people on the island. They were well-equipped with tanks, artillery, and whatnot. The landing was not opposed at the beach like at Tarawa, so they were able to move inland. But they started getting heavy fire and an artillery bombardment. One of the first boats back--LVTs--from the beach where I was had a body lying on the bottom--a headless body--and I said, "Who's that?" Then they said, "That's Captain Triplett." He was one of our captains from the same group that I was particularly friendly with. He was from our battalion. He was from Arkansas somewhere. He'd been hit on the boat going in.

They were all crowded and standing up, so there really was no room to get down. A 20-millimeter shell hit him just square in the head, splattered his brains all over everybody else on the boat. It was terrible! Anyway, they got in, and I would get calls, and I would send something out of a floating warehouse I had out there that they needed.

Daniels: So, you were actually using this system you had devised.

Kerr: We used the system. The system worked very well, so everything was just going fine. We were getting shell fire all around our little boat. I asked the captain of this patrol boat, "What would happen if you took a hit?" He said, "Oh, this thing would go up like a firecracker!" He said, "This is nothing but flammable stuff--no armor or anything else." We never got hit, needless to say.

But, about the second day, all of a sudden, we were under way! Nobody said anything to me, or I hadn't got a word. I found the skipper, and I said, "What's going on?" He said, "Well, we're pulling out!" I said, "What do you mean, you're pulling out?" He said, "I got the orders! We're pulling out! They're pulling out all the ships!" I didn't even have time to send a message to the division that we were leaving. We were gone! We rendezvoused with the rest of the

ships around on the east side of the island offshore. What had happened was, they'd gotten the word that a very large number of Japanese aircraft were coming in. This led to what was called the "Marianas Turkey Shoot." We shot down, I think, 150 Japanese planes or more. But that's why they pulled us all out.

So, we came back a day later, and my mission was over once you get people ashore. But I dreaded going in because I didn't know what kind of a reception I'd get because we had suddenly disappeared, you know. Then we had a new division commander, a general who was almost...this would be undiplomatic; I might hit on that later. But he was the very antithesis of General Smith. Smith was very much a gentleman. You know, Smith was very firm and all that, but he was a very reasonable man.

Daniels: Smith was.

Kerr: Smith was. Well, there was this general. His name was [name deleted]. He was known as [name deleted]. He had commanded the landing of a brigade that took Eniwetok. Julian Smith had been idolized by everyone, so [name deleted] was at a disadvantage in being his replacement. I didn't help when he announced upon assuming command that, in effect, the division needed to shape up, etc. It was sort of the kind of talk Patton gave his command after the disaster at Kasserine

Pass in North Africa. The Second Division, however, was at the top of its game. It had just received the Presidential Unit Citation for Tarawa. The staff had people like Dave Shoup and Wallace Greene. The ADC [assistant division commander] was Merritt Edsen. The regimental and battalion commanders were out-standing, as were the rest. Morale was high. It was just inappropriate on his part, and it caused him to be unpopular.

General [Name deleted] wanted to get an aide--this was back on the island of Hawaii before we went out on this operation--so he told each of the regimental commanders that he'd like for them to send a candidate that would be interviewed by him for his aide. Of course, nobody wanted to have the job, but they finally told this one young second lieutenant that he was going to go up there to be interviewed. He could play the piano, so they felt like that was a good qualification for a general's aide. He could play the piano; he could entertain. But this guy was kind of a young, quiet guy. He goes up and sits in the office, and General [name deleted] calls him in. He said, "Sit down!" So, he sat down. He leaned across the desk and said, "Whatever made you think you wanted to be a general's aide!" This guy looked at the general and said, "Well, I never did think I wanted to be a

general's aide."

Daniels: (Laughter)

Kerr: (Laughter) "You don't want to be my aide?" He said, "Well, no, sir! I'd rather not!" (laughter)

Daniels: (Laughter)

Kerr: So, he didn't get the job.

Daniels: I don't imagine (chuckle).

Kerr: The guy that got it was a long, tall guy from Alabama with a very broad southern accent, a very loud voice, and he absolutely hated the general. The command post ashore where I went...and, incidentally, I didn't get court-martialed or anything. They knew about where I was and what had happened. I got no commendation either, you know. I didn't even get any acknowledgment of my existence--which is about natural or normal. But here in this command post, you could hear this aide, and he didn't try to minimize the volume of his speech. He said, "Just wait until I get out of this [expletive deleted] Marine Corps! I'll kill that [expletive deleted] if I ever find him!" (Chuckle) Now, he was talking about General [name deleted].

Daniels: Who was this guy? What was his name?

Kerr: I can't remember his name. I just remember that you could hear him all over. Everybody got a big kick out of it. I guess General [name deleted] couldn't hear him.

But General [name deleted] idea of how to draw a battle plan for Saipan and Tinian was with a ruler. He would get out a ruler and would draw a line. He said, "This is the "O-1"--your first objective." Well, one guy is out on a flat plain with tank support, and another guy might be on the edge of the island and hanging on a cliff, practically, because his front was assigned to him. You know, if you didn't have anybody shooting, that wouldn't assure anything, and it would take you forever to get there. Well, he would get on the phone every morning. He'd call each of his battalion commanders that was in the assault, and he'd say, "Where are you?" The guy would tell him, and he might respond, "Ah!" You know, that would mean they were where they were supposed to be, I guess. But he'd get this other guy who had the cliff, and he'd say, "Where are you?" He said, "Well, over here at so-and-so. It's pretty slow going." He'd say, "Goddamn! I could crawl on my belly like a reptile and go faster than that!" And he'd really chew him out and threaten to relieve him and all that. It was just ridiculous stuff!

The only thing that held everything together was that the assistant division commander was Merritt Edson--"Red Mike" Edson. Edson had a reputation of being a pretty tough guy, but he knew combat. He would

go up on the front lines and see what the situation was, and he kept General [name deleted] from relieving some of these commanders.

I went up on one or two trips with Edson on Tinian in particular, which was a nice, flat island. You had these cane fields, and the tanks could maneuver around. You could look out across there and see what was going on. It was just different, you know. It was the kind of thing you always sort of thought would be the kind of conditions you would fight in.

So, we were standing there, and there was this poor woebegone rifleman--dirty, hungry. We had fought for thirty days at Saipan, and then had about a week off, and then made a landing at Tinian. We hadn't had a decent meal the whole time--just rations, you know, packed rations. But, of course, to Edson this was really thrilling, you know. He could see what was going on, see what was happening, be really in control of the situation. He turned to this young Marine, and he said, "Son, how do you like this kind of war?" And this private looked up at him and said, "General, I don't like any kind of war!" (Chuckle) You could tell he really meant it, and you could believe it, too. Edson thought that was pretty funny.

Daniels: What function were you performing at this point?

Kerr: Well, on shore I just then reverted to the Fourth

Section, Logistics Section, and I was assistant D-4. Under the Four came supply, hospitalization. Oh, you know, you had motor transportation, a lot of the "nuts and bolts" of an operation. At the division staff level, of course, you were not directly doing all this. You had the quartermaster, you had the motor transport battalion, you had the engineer battalions, and the medical. All of that came under the general province of the Four Section for planning purposes and for overall direction. So, I did a lot of just going around, seeing how things were working out on supplies --whether they had the ammunition, whether they were getting the transportation they needed--and talking to the regimental and battalion Fours. Every regiment had a Four, and every battalion had a Four.

Daniels: Who were you reporting to?

Kerr: I was reporting to the colonel who was the head of the Four and who reported to the chief of staff, who was Colonel Shoup. My real boss was Colonel Shoup. A lot of times I would be reporting directly to him. So, this was my job after the landing took place.

At Tinian the landing took place over two very...it was a beautiful, successful landing, really well done. They made a big feint, show of landing, down at one end of the island where there was a beach. There were also a lot of defenses set up. We boated

maybe two or three regiments in boats, laid down a big smoke screen down there, had a pre-landing bombardment. All of that was down at the opposite end of the island.

At the other end of the island, you didn't have a single beach, really, maybe fifty-five yards of a kind of a beach and another one separated, smaller than that, and you had rocks all around. They brought in these steel docks, floating docks. So, with all of the feint toward the other end of the island, we suddenly appeared with the real landing up at the other end, but we had to get everything ashore in a hurry because we knew that they would react. So, we were having to put two divisions ashore across these almost nonexistent beaches. I mean, you had very little landing area that you could use--that meant tanks, artillery, all the troops, and everything else. I think I had about fifty-five yards of area that we could use for our division. I was the only LCO for the 2nd Division. Then the LCO for the 4th Division had about the same amount adjoining that. The difference was that he was a full colonel, and I was a captain. I was afraid he might outrank me a little bit when we got into competition, but we actually got unloaded before he did.

Daniels: And you were still a captain?

Kerr: Yes. Everything worked just fine. It was really a wonderful case of deception. It really worked. It was tricky because if you had been wrong it would have been a disaster. But they got some troops up there to counterattack pretty quickly, but they were badly defeated. That island was taken without nearly as much difficulty as Saipan. Saipan was a very bloody operation--a lot worse than anything else that I was involved in.

Daniels: Even worse than Tarawa?

Kerr: Yes. The total number of casualties was much higher. Saipan lasted thirty days. Tarawa lasted seventy-six hours. It was more killed and a lot more wounded. We had set up a hospital on shore after the landing phase was over. One guy that I knew, another captain, had been on the Rice football team, named Ed Singletary. He got wounded three times and went back to action, so you could take care of most wounds right there at this hospital that had been set up.

That really brought my overseas career to an end. The division adjutant told me, "Did you know that you've got orders to go back to the States?" I said, "I do? Where are they?" He said "Aw, hell, they've been here for three weeks." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, Colonel Shoup said he'll give them to you when he's ready to."

Daniels: This was while you were lying off Tinian?

Kerr: No, this was after we had finished at Tinian.

Daniels: Where'd you go then?

Kerr: We went back to Saipan. That's where our camp was after that. So, he said, "Well, he'll deliver your orders when he's ready for you to go." It was a little high-handed, but, anyway. And, sure enough, he did. Actually, what he found out was that everyone in the division who had been overseas for two years or more was going to be sent back, including himself, so he was perfectly willing then to let somebody go.

So, I got transportation to the States, back to Headquarters, Marine Corps. This was in, oh, November of 1944. I thought I had some real important job because these orders were special orders: "Come by First Available Air Transportation..." and all that stuff.

Anyway, I got there and found out that they had had some sort of crude form of computer, and they were looking for a lawyer who had at least two years overseas and who had been wounded. I think those were the things that they cranked on a machine and pulled a lever, and up popped my card. I was the only one that fit that bill. I was a lawyer, although I had never practiced law. I had had some legal encounters, but that was strictly like any officer would.

So, they wanted me to relieve a man down at Camp Lejeune, which was the big base on the East Coast, who had not been overseas. They wanted him to have a little bit of that action, too, so they had to get somebody to take his place. I went to a course down in Washington that lasted about three months at the Judge Advocate General's, Department of the Navy, reviewing court-martial proceedings that came through there. They all are reviewed, and sometimes they reverse what they did because they felt that there was a error in some respect. So, you got a feel for doing that. The Marine Corps has no judge advocate's department. They have what they call the Discipline Division. At Camp Lejeune, though, they have a camp legal office and a camp legal officer and maybe ten or fifteen lawyers. They have a defense counsel and judge advocates who prosecute these cases. All unassigned general court-martial cases from east of the Mississippi River would be referred to Camp Lejeune. They had as many as 100 to 115 general courts-martial a month there, so it was a big factory.

The (chuckle) commanding general was guess who? On the base, [name deleted]. He was a stickler for rules. We'd get these investigative reports, and he would want to give them a general court-martial. But the camp legal officer had to certify that there was at

least a prima facie case for prosecution--that if you believe the evidence, then he could be guilty of a crime. I was the assistant camp legal officer. The camp legal officer was a friend of mine, also from our division.

Daniels: Who was that?

Kerr: His name was Charley Janvier, from New Orleans. He had been the division legal officer of the 2nd Marine Division. We would review these files, and then we would send a memorandum to the general either that you could prosecute this person if there was a prima facie case or not if there wasn't. But every once in a while we'd see one that we just felt really ought not to be prosecuted, so we would manage to find some basis for saying that there was no prima facie case. The general did not like that. He would push his buzzer--his office was right up above us--and he'd say, "Come here! I know what you're doin'! You're not fooling me!" I'd say, "General, I'm sorry. I mean, that's just the law. I don't make the law, and you don't make the law. That's the way it is." He really would get sore, but he couldn't really do anything about it.

Daniels: What sort of cases would you kill?

Kerr: Well, they had one case where this corporal was to be prosecuted by general court-martial for basically obscene conduct. They have these charges that are very

broad. Their only offense is in the military--conduct to the prejudice of good order and discipline; or if it is an officer, conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman. You know, that could cover a multitude of sins.

Well, the investigation report said that he had been arrested by the police in Wilmington, North Carolina, for exposing himself and had paid a hundred dollar fine. We had investigators that worked for us, and the investigator gave quite a different story as to what had happened. This young corporal was married, and he and his wife lived in this boarding house. This woman who lived next door, an old biddy, claimed that she had seen them naked in their bedroom, which I'm sure they were. This violated a North Carolina statute which said that it was a violation of law for persons of opposite sexes to appear in each other's company unclothed. Well, you couldn't have a husband and wife engaged in sexual intercourse or produce children or anything else if you literally enforce that law, unless they were awfully sneaky (chuckle). That was the statute under which they fined this guy.

So, it sounded fishy--the whole thing--and we sent the investigator back to Wilmington to just check on things, to question this woman and find out where she was when she saw all this. How did she happen to see

it? It turns out that the only way she could have seen them was to stand on a ladder or a chair up on the landing of the stairs to look out a window that was across from this other window. There was no other way to see in. She had to admit that that's what she did. Oh, you know, that's a ridiculous thing. He was going to get a general court-martial for it.

So, anyway, it would have been a fairly flagrant violation of what I would have considered due process to give some of these guys a court-martial.

Daniels: And the commanding officer wanted to go ahead and prosecute this case, even knowing the facts?

Kerr: Oh, yes. We wrote him a memorandum telling him what the investigation showed. He still wanted to give him a general court-martial.

Well, be that as it may, that's what I was doing when the war came to an end. We were just getting ready to go back out again, though. You came back for six months, and then you went back out again for another two years. That was the program.

Daniels: Where were they planning to send you?

Kerr: Well, I was going back to a division or corps staff. But who knows where I would have gone?

[Tape 3, Side 2]

Kerr: But at any rate, the war came to an end when they dropped the bomb, and we didn't have to go. We had had

some contact, before I left Saipan, from headquarters about the general plans for the landing in Japan. We knew the beaches where we were to land, and we knew the order of battle. All six Marine divisions were going to land in line in the initial assault.

Daniels: Where?

Kerr: Well, there was a beach on Kyushu, I believe. I don't know why it would have been there. But maybe it was on the main island. I can't recall, but we had pictures of it, photographs of it, aerial photographs. The mountains rose up right behind it. Aerial reconnaissance indicated that it was heavily fortified --a lot of artillery there. We would be followed in the second wave by, I think, thirty-two Army divisions. We were all out in the Pacific--all the Army divisions that were available in the Pacific, including MacArthur's. Then they were going to embark something like seventy divisions in Europe and sail directly out there. They would come in after the others had landed. It would have been a terrible bloodbath, particularly for the Japanese when you think about how they fought to the death. You think about them on their own home islands; you think about the millions of civilians and what happens to a town or city when you fight through it. When we went through Garapan, this really modern little city just disappeared. It had to be bulldozed

into the sea--the remains of it. So, you can imagine what would have happened in the Japanese cities. I would say that there would have been millions of people killed in a land combat in Japan. I've seen estimates, as far as Americans killed, of somewhere between 1,000,000 and 1,5000,000 men, but I don't know how you'd figure that. Who knows?

Daniels: Some predicted losses as low as 40,000. I wonder why they would come up with such a low number?

Kerr: I can't imagine 40,000. That's ridiculous, if you look at Iwo Jima, look at Okinawa. Look at Saipan. Our three divisions there had about 20,000 casualties.

Daniels: And you think that had we invaded the main islands they'd have fought just like that?

Kerr: Oh, yes. That's just their whole philosophy. They'd have fought really hard there, I think.

Daniels: So, when did you get out of the military?

Kerr: I had all the points I needed to get out under the point system. You get points for various things. I had a number of campaigns. I had Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Kwajalein, Saipan, and Tinian; so I had five. I had been overseas for twenty-four or twenty-five months. I had been wounded. All of those things gave me points, so I got out quite early, in October of 1945.

Daniels: And what did you do then?

Kerr: Well, I went back home and started looking for a job.

I had a few offers and finally got something that I really wanted to do.

Daniels: Which was?

Kerr: Well, this is a large law firm in Houston. It's an old firm--the one started by James A. Baker's great-grandfather, the first James A. Baker. Baker and Botts, it's called. It's one of the big law firms, well over a hundred years old. They took people in on the basis of merit, and you couldn't be related to a partner. You couldn't be a son or a nephew or a brother.

Daniels: And you stayed there how long?

Kerr: I was not the son, nephew, or brother of anybody. I stayed there. I became a partner and headed up the corporate department of the firm. I officially severed all remaining ties with the firm in 1977.

Daniels: What did you do after that?

Kerr: Well, in 1968 I was made general counsel of Pennzoil Company, but I still remained as a partner. It became apparent that I couldn't do that and do anything else. I was elected to the board in 1964, and I was elected as general counsel in 1968. In 1977 I was elected as president of the company. So, I made the complete transition.

Then I retired for the first time in 1985. We were involved in this major litigation with Texaco over

Getty Oil. Since I had had a lot to do with that matter, I was designated as corporate representative, and I sat through the whole trial with the attorneys. I also was designated to be the negotiator for the company for any possible settlement both before the trial and afterwards. That, obviously, was taking all my time, so I came back on the payroll, finally, and then retired again about three or four years ago.

Daniels: Has that suit ever been finally settled?

Kerr: Oh, yes. We collected \$3 billion. We had a judgment for \$12 billion.

Daniels: Yes, I remember that.

Kerr: It was certainly enforceable. But they had taken bankruptcy as a maneuver, and it would have been...at \$3 billion everybody wanted to settle except Texaco-- I mean, all their stockholder representatives and their creditors and everybody else. It was obvious that they could pay that. The Getty properties were worth a heck of a lot more than that.

Daniels: They kept the Getty property?

Kerr: They kept the Getty property. So, it was certainly, I think, the very minimum that we could justify settling for. It's better to go ahead and settle and get the money. It was bad for our company to be so involved for so long in that it took too much of people's time. It took people away from management. Mistakes were

made, opportunities were lost, and it just was not good for the company to go on. So, it was done, and I agreed to remain active until the settlement funds were reinvested. It's hard to determine just when that happens. They've been reinvested, but we're still doing various things. I'm chairman of the Executive Committee. I'm just like a director; I don't get paid anything extra for doing that. But I got paid a big bonus salary when they collected the judgment, so I can't complain about that.

Daniels: That's good. So, let's go back to a few things here. You were only wounded the one time?

Kerr: That's all.

Daniels: Have you had any recurrence from the malaria?

Kerr: Not since Kwajalein. That was the last one.

Daniels: It didn't affect you at all?

Kerr: No, I don't think so. It never has come back.

Daniels: Good.

Kerr: The only long-term result of the wound was that it deadened the nerves running from my knee down the forepart of my leg to my feet. It doesn't affect the use of the leg or anything, but I have a constant tingling sensation. It doesn't matter because I'm so used to it that I forget about it. I don't even think about it.

Daniels: You weren't any way considered to be brought back for

Korea?

Kerr: Oh, yes. I was promoted to major.

Daniels: When was that?

Kerr: Just about the time I left. We had been on a summer vacation and came back, driving into town, and a guy was standing out in the middle of the street hawking a newspaper with a big headline saying, "All Marine Officers Recalled." (chuckle)

Daniels: (Laughter)

Kerr: That's a great thought, you know. I went home, and that's what they said on the radio. But the next two or three days, they changed it and said that all Marine officers through the rank of captain were being recalled. And they were.

Daniels: Every single one?

Kerr: Yes, sir. I knew guys that were sitting in their office one week, and within two weeks time they were in Korea on the line.

Daniels: So, your promotion to major spared you?

Kerr: It just did, I'll tell you.

Daniels: So, they didn't call you up and say, "Why don't you come on back?"

Kerr: Well, that sort of disappointed me. I kind of thought they might say, "We gotta get this guy back in here. We can't fight the war without him." That wasn't the way they looked at it (chuckle).

Daniels: You were just as happy?

Kerr: I was just as happy.

Daniels: Can you tell me anything about your experiences as legal officer while you were still overseas in the Pacific.

Kerr: Well, they never really had a legal officer. They had courts-martial, and you would be appointed, or they'd have courts of inquiry or boards of inquiry. Boards of Investigation, I think, was the term for that. That was all by the rules, and you would assign an officer who would just be designated to do that, whether they were lawyers or what.

"Durf" and I, in our company, decided that we did not want to have anybody court-martialed unless there was just no way to avoid it because if you'd send somebody to the brig, it usually ruined them, broke their spirit, their self-esteem. So, if somebody committed some offense, like, being over leave, you know, late showing up or some other thing like that, we would give him a choice. We'd say, "Look, if you want to have a deck court-martial or summary court-martial, we'll give it to you. What we'd rather do is not give you a court-martial, but figure out some other way that will remind you that you goofed off and you're going have to do a little better next time." It may be a lot of things, like, gathering firewood, or it could be

doing some other extra duty. It was clearly punishment, though. But it was nothing like the kind of punishment that was hazardous to anybody's health or whatever.

Actually, we never had many cases where there was a real disciplinary problem. We had an unusually good bunch of people. They were mostly volunteers right after Pearl Harbor. A lot of them had one to two years of college. A lot of them were high school graduates. They were very, very good people. We really never had much of a problem like that in our battalion even. You didn't hear Sergeant Michelony yesterday, but somebody took his oral history. You did? I don't know what he had to say, but when he made his talk up there, he talked about the leadership, that they had good NCOs, had good officers, and had good discipline, good leadership.

Really, I think if you have a lot of people getting in trouble, there is something wrong with the leadership. That's a sure sign to me that somebody is not using good judgment or they are not instilling the right attitude. So, we never really had much of that.

I was asked to defend a couple of guys in cases, and I don't know whether I was the prosecutor in any or not. One of the cases was a serious case. This corporal was charged with manslaughter. When I got the

file...well, they told me, "We want you to defend this guy because we don't want him to be convicted." This was his commanding officer. I don't know who decided he had needed to be prosecuted. But, the facts were that this arose on the island of Espiritu Santo, and this was not any part of our unit. I mean, this was a whole different command.

Daniels: Where was this taking place?

Kerr: The court-martial was taking place in Wellington, New Zealand. They sent him down for prosecution there. I found out, anyway, that what had happened was that this corporal had gone into the communications tent. The noncommissioned officer in charge of this had been acting very strangely for a month or two before. He wouldn't leave the tent; he didn't wear any clothes most of the time; he wouldn't go out to eat. He would just eat cheese and crackers. So, there was something wrong with him, for sure.

Anyway, the corporal went in the tent to deliver a message to be sent by the communications people. He looked over and saw that this noncommissioned officer or warrant officer, maybe it was, in charge of communications had a Thompson submachine gun in his hands and had seven people lined up over against the tent wall. I can't remember what he said, but he was clearly getting ready to shoot them. He saw a baseball

bat standing up by the tent pole, the corporal did. He picked it up, slipped up behind this guy, and whacked him with it and saved these people's lives. This guy died--the fellow he hit.

So, it was just like the Rodney King legal principle involved: did he use excessive force? I don't think anybody would want you just to tap him gently. This guy has got a loaded submachine gun here. Furthermore, the doctors said that this man had what they call an "eggshell" cranium, very thin bone structure. A normal man, it wouldn't have killed him. But notwithstanding all that, they decided to prosecute him. The excuse was that, if he was vindicated, then he wouldn't be subject to further prosecution when he went back home, in case somebody wanted to prosecute him for killing this guy.

It was very difficult to get much testimony about what had actually happened because all the doctors there were very sensitive to the fact that they had not certified this warrant officer as being nutty as a fruit cake. I mean, they should have relieved him of his duty and sent him to some psychiatric ward somewhere. It was perfectly obvious. But they did nothing. So, to get them to testify or acknowledge what his condition was was very difficult. They would pussyfoot all around that. I could get one or two

people to testify, but it was difficult without having the medical testimony. I finally talked one of the doctors into testifying.

I was very proud of my speech to the court--my summation for my client. I said, "You know, he picked up that baseball bat, and under all these circumstances I just want to ask you, if you had been his coach, would you tell him to lay down a bunt, or would you tell him to go for the wall?" Anyway, they acquitted him. It was no great shakes. He never should have even had to stand trial.

I had another one for a corporal who went into this enlisted men's club in Wellington at the Hotel Cecil. It was pretty dark in there, and everybody was around the bar and all that. A warrant officer wore an enlisted man's uniform--the same kind of greens. His insignia of rank was, like, a bomb, the shape of a bomb, a round bomb on his epaulet. It was out of a dark metal, and it was not easy to see at all, particularly in the dark.

Anyway, this corporal went in to get a drink, and this warrant officer sort of pushed him around. He was drunk, the warrant officer was. Finally, he shoved the corporal, and the corporal says, "You are a chickenshit!" or "Don't be a chickenshit!" or something. He was charged with having conduct to the

prejudice of good order and discipline in that he did on this date, at this place, say to a superior officer, "You are a chickenshit" or words to that effect--the United States then being in a state of war. That was the way the charges would read.

Once again, nobody in his outfit wanted to see him get convicted, so they asked me to defend him. They had a lot more faith in me as a lawyer than they should have (chuckle). So, anyway, we managed to get him off, also. I debated whether to try to have a defense saying that, in fact, this guy was a chickenshit (laughter), that he was just telling the truth.

Daniels: Unfortunately, in some military situations the truth is not sufficient.

Kerr: That's right. No, he got off because it was clear that he couldn't see that he was indistinguishable and that the guy didn't identify himself, etc., etc. You had to give the court an excuse for acquitting him because most of those courts, you know, they figure they're not trying this guy unless his commanding officer thought he ought to be tried. You know, there is a great presumption of guilt that you have to contend with.

Daniels: So, why did they let that one come to trial?

Kerr: I don't know. I think it was because this warrant officer pushed it, but the man's commanding officer thought it was ridiculous. So, that was just a couple.

Daniels: Well, we've done very, very well here. Is there anything else you'd like to add before we close this interview?

Kerr: Well, no. It's amazing how clearly you remember all these things because that's been fifty years ago. But I think it made quite a deep impression on everybody. You see that at this conference. I mean, the people can recall, in great detail, the things that happened and, I think, very accurately.

Daniels: Well, I must compliment you. I think you do somewhat better than average. Your memory is very, very sharp.

Kerr: Well, I don't know whether that's good or bad. I don't think I live in the past.

Daniels: One final question here. I'm sure this isn't a happy one, but you never did tell me what happened to the man who was out in front of the lines and who couldn't be brought back in.

Kerr: Oh, he was dead. He would have died anyway. He was just going fast. He was dead. He still had his BAR, and there were ten or fifteen dead Japanese bodies around there. Whether he shot them or not, I don't know.

Daniels: But, you found his body right there?

Kerr: Yes. And he was not torn up. I don't think he got hit directly by any kind of shell.

Daniels: So, friendly fire didn't kill him.

Kerr: Well, I'd like to think that.

Daniels: Well, thank you very much, sir. This was very, very nice.