

Martin Capra

WORLD WAR TWO
VIDEO INTERVIEW PROJECT

GRANT, MELVIN Interviewed 27 Dec 2002 by Joe L. Todd Moore, OK

Todd: Today is September 27th, 2002. My name is Joe Todd and this is an interview with Melvin Grant in Moore, Oklahoma for the Eisenhower Library. Sir, where were you born?

Grant: Scipio, Oklahoma.

T: When were you born?

G: March, 30, 1923.

T: who was your father?

G: Elige Grant.

T: And your mother?

G: Hattie Rockholt Grant.

T: Did you go through school in Scipio?

G: I started school at Hulo School near Scipio and I finished in a CCC Camp in 1940.

T: Was Hulo a one room school?

G: Yes. There were 6 of us in school and we went to school in a buggy.

T: How did one teacher handle all the grades in one room?

G: The teach called the grade she was teaching to the front and the others remained in their seats studying.

T: What type of work did your father do?

G: He was a farmer.

T: What chores did you do on the farm?

G: Chopped cotton, picked cotton, cut wood, fed the hogs and chickens and milked cows.

T: You went to the 8th grade in Hulo School?

G: Yes, then I joined the CCC Program in 1940 and got out in 1941.

T: Why was the CCC program organized?

G: To built terraces, plant trees and grass to stop erosion. We built bridges and parks.

T: Where did you work in the CCC program?

G: I worked in Pryor, I don't remember of the number of the camp.

T: What did you do at Pryor?

G: I was an officers orderly for a while then I worked in the field planting grass and trees.

Grant - page 2

T: Where did you stay at Pryor?

G: We had 5 barracks and there were about 50 of us in each barracks, 250 altogether.

T: What is your most vivid memory of the CCC Program?

G: Good food, they furnished us clothes and we got \$30.00 a month. I had a brother in the program and he sent \$22.00 home to mother so my \$22.00 was put in the bank for me. I received \$8.00 a month to buy whatever we needed.

T: What was the reaction of the local people in Pryor to the CCC boys?

G: They enjoyed us being there.

T: Do you remember September 1st, 1939 when Germany invaded Poland?

G: I do remember it.

T: What was your reaction?

G: We were on the farm, but didn't pay that much attention. We were concerned but no one was eligible to be drafted. The second oldest brother joined then my youngest brother joined the Marines and when I was drafted, they said they needed 5 Marines and I volunteered for the Marines.

T: What did you do after the CCC program?

G: I went to California and baled hay for a while. The war was in full swing and I helped build Camp Cook, California.

T: How did you travel to California?

G: I went by car. I paid \$10.00 each for my brother and myself. A car was going and they charged \$10.00 to drive you to California.

T: Did you have any trouble traveling to California?

G: No, there was always someone going to California.

T: Where did you go to California?

G: We went to Bakersfield.

T: Were you considered an Okie?

G: Yes, but it didn't bother me, I was proud to be from Oklahoma. I worked on the farms that had been established by people from Oklahoma.

T: What is your most vivid memory of California?

G: We baled hay at night on the farms.

Grant - page 3

T: Where were you on December 7th, 1941?

G: Camp Cook, California. We hadn't turned the radio on in the pickup that morning and we were told when we got to work. One of the guys had been in the Marines and he said he was resigning his job to join the Corps and help out.

T: Where was Camp Cook located?

G: Near San Luis Obispo. It is now Vandenberg Air Force Base.

T: What did you do at Camp Cook?

G: We were delivering plumbing supplies. Truckload after truckload of plumbing supplies.

T: Who were you working for?

G: Lord and Hastroff. They had the plumbing contract at Camp Cook.

T: When you heard about the attack, what was your reaction?

G: We knew we would be deeper in the war because we had another front. We worked up to 14 hours a day and paid 75 cents an hour and time and a half after 10 hours and double time after 12 hours. It was big money at that time.

T: Were you drafted or did you enlist?

G: I had a 2-C Classification because I worked on a farm, but I decided to get into the war. I wanted to join the Merchant Marines, but they wanted 5 Marines and I volunteered for the marines.

T: When did you join the Marines?

G: December the 4th, 1943.

T: Before you joined the military, how did rationing affect you?

G: There were a lot of things you couldn't buy. After I worked in California I bought a Chevrolet Pickup for \$635. I was working at the McAlester Ammunition Depot and took riders and I was issued stamps to buy 4 new tires.

T: Where did you go for your Boot Camp?

G: San Diego.

T: How did you travel to San Diego?

G: By train.

T: Was it a troop train or a civilian train?

G: It was a civilian train.

Grant - page 4

T: What trains had priority on the rails, civilian or troop trains?

G: Most of the trains were civilian trains.

T: Was the train you on ever put on a siding to let other trains go by?

G: No.

T: Tell me about Boot Camp?

G: We started early in the morning and we were on the parade ground at 4:00 in the morning sometimes. We had no hot water, we took cold showers. When the DI called to get out of bet, we had 2 minutes to get dressed and lined up, ready to go.

T: What type of training did you have?

G: At the beginning, marching and exercises then we went to the rifle range.

T: What rifle did you train with?

G: The M-1.

T: Did you have the forced marches?

G: Yes.

T: What do you carry on a forced march?

G: The necessities. A blanket, bed roll, mess kit, extra clothing and items like that.

T: What is your most vivid memory of Boot Camp?

G: All lined up when we got off the bus and the Drill Instructor said, "This is the sorriest bunch I have ever seen and we can make Marines out of you, it will be a miracle, but we'll try".

T: What were you called in Boot Camp?

G: They were not allowed to curse us or hit us. Boot was a common name.

T: When were you first called a Marine?

G: When I graduated with 1500 other Marines on the parade ground, we were told we were United States Marines.

T: How did Boot Camp last?

G: 11 weeks, graduated in early 1944.

T: Any individual stand out in your memory from Boot Camp?

G: The Drill Instructors, Hotley and Edd. Jay Hotley, I can't remember Edd's first name.

T: From Boot Camp, where did you go?

G: I went on a 10 day leave to Oakland, California where my wife and daughter were then went

Grant - page 5

back to camp then was transferred to Port Chicago, California where ammunition was loaded on 2 ships day and night. We guarded the igloos and the ships. Three days after I left, after being three 6 months, both ships blew up and killed 320 people.

T: What is an igloo?

G: A place where the trains were backed in and dirt was piled up on both sides. I pulled guard duty on the docks at times.

T: Where is Port Chicago?

G: About 25 miles from Mare Island. 25 of us were sent there from San Diego. My wife and daughter came there and rented a room in a house with kitchen privileges and paid \$30.00 a month.

T: What were your duties at Port Chicago?

G: Guard duty was 48 hours and 48 hours off and that was routine. We had to exercise because they knew we wouldn't be there long. I was then transferred to Camp Pendleton for further training. On September the 11th, my wife's birthday, I boarded a ship and left September the 12th. 15 days later we arrived in the Russell Islands.

T: What ship were you on?

G: USS General Harry Taylor.

T: What kind of ship was the Harry Taylor?

G: Troop ship. 3,500 troops on the ship.

T: Where were your quarters?

G: On the bottom deck where the torpedoes come through. If a torpedo came into your compartment, there were 2 Navy guards to shut the hatches with you in it so the rest of the ship could be saved.

T: How did you pass the time on the trip?

G: Shooting dice.

T: Did you get seasick?

G: I think everyone got seasick but me. I was sea for a total of 72 days and never got seasick.

T: How high were the bunks stacked?

G: Seven high and I had the top bunk.

T: What about the meals on the ship?

Grant - page 6

G: They were fair, but you had to hold on because the sea was rough at times. Some guys would get sick at the table.

T: You left the states from what port?

G: San Diego.

T: When the ship was leaving the states, what were you thinking?

G: Going to do a job I was called to do. I was very patriotic and had no regrets. Freedom and democracy for America.

T: Where did you land?

G: the Russell Island, 70 miles west of Guadalcanal. Guadalcanal had already been secured. We went to Guadalcanal for maneuvers. I met my brother on Guadalcanal. He was in the 6th Marine Division.

T: What unit were you assigned to?

G: Company E, 7th Regiment, 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Division. I was a demolition specialist and a flame thrower.

T: What does a demolition specialist do?

G: Take a satchel charge that weighs 14 pounds of TNT, set the fuse, sling it in a cave and run like hell.

T: What type of fuses did the satchel charges have?

G: It is a fuse that you pull and it ignites automatically and you have 7 seconds to get rid of it.

T: How does the flame thrower work?

G: It has three tanks, one is a pressure tank that has 2100 pounds of pressure. There is a valve that reduces the pressure down to 350 pounds of pressure into the tanks that have the napalm. There is cylinder match that begins to burn when you pull the trigger. The fuel is released and goes over that burning match and sets the napalm on fire. When you shoot that into a cave, you better set your feet or it will set you on your backside.

T: What is the range of the flamethrower?

G: About 100 feet.

T: From Russell Island, where did you go?

G: We went to Guadalcanal and had amphibious training. We hit the beaches just like we were invading the island. We fired the rifles and the machine guns and could mow down the palm

Grant - page 7

trees. We had the 60mm and 81 mm mortars. I took the plug out of the flamethrower and it was pressurized which it was not supposed to be. It blew up and covered me with napalm. If I had been smoking or anyone smoking, I would have burned to death. They took me to a field hospital, cleaned me up, gave me new clothes and sent me back.

T: When you invade the island, how do you get off the landing craft?

G: The front lowers and you get off or you can go down a cargo net. Some had ramps and some didn't. We rode the LST's to Guadalcanal then rode them up to Ulithi Island which was 28 days on the ship. The ship was full of tanks and most of us slept up on the deck. We had canvas cots but we had to tie them down because you would either be washed off or blown off. We then went to Okinawa, 4 days from Ulithi. The day before we landed at Okinawa, we were given steak and eggs, the first time that ever happened in the Pacific. Our LST was slow and was left behind and the convoy went on. The sea was rough except the day of the invasion and the ocean was smooth as it could be. The Suicide Planes were coming in and we were shooting them down and we cheered just like someone had hit a home run every time one of them hit the water. Some of the Suicide planes were scoring and I heard that 100 of the suicide planes were at Okinawa.

T: Any of the planes approach your ship?

G: No, but it was sunk 2 days after I got off of it.

T: when did you arrive at Okinawa?

G: April 1st, 1945

T: I would like for you to start from the time you got off the LST and tell me what happened.

G: I was carrying my flame thrower and got in the boat that held 13 men. My assistant, James McKay had a cigar and yelled "gung ho" and we headed toward the beach. Ernie Pyle was there and took my picture going in at Okinawa. He was killed 10 days later. We got to the beach and didn't receive a lot of resistance. We went forward and captured an airport. Nine Japanese planes came over and flew out over the fleet. One landed at the airport, he didn't know we had captured it. Another took off and headed toward Tokyo at full speed but he had to go over the fleet on the other side of the island, so I doubt if he made it. It took us 4 days and nights to cross the island. The 4th night, the Japanese hung one of their own men in a tree about 50 yards in front of us. We don't know why they did that but I thought it was one less for us to take care of. They may have been trying to scare us. On the 12th of April, 120 of us went on patrol up into the

Grant - page 8

mountains. We were told to take rations for one meal and 2 canteens of water. Half way up the mountain, the lieutenant told us to sit down and eat our rations. While we were eating, the Japanese surrounded us and kept us surrounded for 2 ½ days and nights with no food or water. One of my assistants was shot through the right shoulder. My flame thrower assistant, laying next to me was shot through the right thumb. My first sergeant was shot through the nose and both of his eyes. Another guy name Maloney got shot through the left lung. A fellow named Reynolds was shot through the guts. We were trapped and could not get out. Reynolds's and Maloney's sergeants were arguing who was going to be taken out first. Two days later the tanks came up and gave us some cover. We lost 29 men in 30 minutes there. The sniper that shot the 4 men around me shot at me 7 times and missed. I played dead and he stopped shooting. We finally got out and went back to camp. I never was shot. We went back across the island and headed several of us went to some cliffs to target practice. A lieutenant arrested us because we were not supposed to be there. I was taken to my first sergeant and I had a 27 day beard. He told me to get that beard off because I had to see the Old Man. The Old Man was our colonel who was 32 years old. He told me to stay away from those places that I would have plenty to practice on in just a few days. The 27th Army Division was shot up so bad that the 1st and 6th Marine Divisions had to take their positions. On the way to the 27th position, I met my brother going down and we stopped and talked for a while. We were on the right and fought there. My brother came to see me again and it was during the monsoon rains. I asked if he had anything to eat and he said, "no". I can of rations and opened it and said, "Let's eat and be merry because tomorrow we may die". He said, "If one of us dies, I hope it is me because you have a wife and daughter". that is the last time I ever saw him. The last battle was on Kinishi Ridge and we lost 1,050 killed and wounded. That is where my brother was killed on the 17th day of June, 1945. It is called the Father's Day Massacre.

T: What is your brother's name?

G: Scott Grant. I talked to one of his friends and the medic that treated him said Scott told me, "Tell my mother I died like a Marine, fighting". We were shot up so bad, we didn't have enough Marines to go forward. The lieutenant sent a runner back to get some artillery up there. He was going down and jumping into foxholes and jumped in the foxhole where my brother was and my brother said he would go and when he got up, he was shot back in the foxhole and that is where

Grant - page 9

he died. Another close call was on Shuri Ridge. We had been shot up and I was in an old house with the top blown off. There were three doors in the house and I was in a corner and the Japanese were shooting machine gun fire in all three doors. The lieutenant came in and I told him to come over to my corner. As he was crawling toward me, a sniper shot a hole through my hat.

T: How long were you on Okinawa?

G: April 1st, 1945 until October when we were sent to China.

T: I heard some of the Japanese committed suicide on Okinawa.

G: Lots of them did. That is just like the suicide pilots.

T: Did you use the flame thrower on Okinawa?

G: Sure.

T: Did you have interpreters to try to get the Japanese to surrender?

G: We did it ourselves. We learned in Japanese, "Come on out, don't be afraid, take off your uniform". We said this over and over.

T: Did many come out?

G: Not many.

T: How did feel about using the flame thrower?

G: Good. They came to Hawaii and killed 2,400 Americans during a sneak attack. They were going to take over America, close our schools and churches, kill our men and boys and rape our women. We would use whatever it took to save democracy for America.

T: When would you use a satchel charge or use the flame thrower?

G: That is up to the people on the line. Those caves went for miles in those mountains. The atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6th, 1945 and one on Nagasaki on August 9th and on the 10th the Japanese offered to surrender and the US accepted the surrender on August the 11th.

T: Did you prepare for the invasion of Japan?

G: We were already prepared, just do what we had been doing.

T: When you heard Japan had surrendered, what was your reaction?

G: Rejoiced.

T: What did you do?

G: Others got wilder then we did and had some gun accidents while they were celebrating.

Grant - page 10

T: Tell me about going to China.

G: We went up the Yangtze River and disarmed the Japanese at Tensing. We had guards on the trains. The Nationalists and the Communists were fighting there. I was put off on a railroad bridge with another Marine. We had a case of grenades and one rifle. We were told if the Communists try to cross we were to stop them but if the Nationalists came to let them cross. Pretty soon here came a platoon of Chinese, 63 men. Their lieutenant saluted me and I saluted him back. I didn't know if they were Communist or Nationalist, so I let them cross. The Marine on the other side of the bridge let them pass because I let them cross. What was I going to do with a case of grenades against 63 men? Later on I found a squad of 13 Japanese that were still armed. I made hand motions for them to get on the train and they went out with us to help guard the train. A few months before we were fighting each other and now we were guarding a train together. They didn't speak English and I didn't speak Japanese.

T: When did you leave China?

G: February of 1946.

T: What is your most vivid memory of China?

G: It is heavily populated and most everybody is destitute. We were constantly busy being train guards. We stayed in a hospital and a Chinese Communist Captain called and told us to surrender and our captain told him to "Come on, we are not surrendering". They didn't show up. We were taken to the disembarkation center and everybody's name was called except mine. My records were lost and everyone got on the ship except me. That was a long 10 days. I got on the next ship and it broke down coming home. I thought "I've heard of a slow boat to China and I'm on it". We were on the ship 18 days.

T: What was the name of the ship?

G: I think it was the USS Burgundy.

T: Where did you land?

G: San Diego where I left from.

T: When you first saw the coastline of the US, what was your reaction?

G: There was a sign in large letters out in the water, "Welcome home, job well done". We got off the ship and the Red Cross was there. We hadn't had milk in 18 months. We were taken to the mess hall and had pork chops, fried chicken, steak and all kinds of vegetables. We were fed

Grant - page 11

like kings for 7 days.

T: When were you discharged?

G: March the 7th, 1946. Some people were going to San Francisco where my wife lived and went up there. I caught the bus to Pittsburgh, Kansas where my wife had moved, but she had moved again and I couldn't find her. I was walking in downtown Pittsburgh and my wife and daughter came around the corner. We had a reunion right there. I was getting ready to hitchhike back to Oakland to my sister's to find out where my wife was. All her letters came back and I didn't write her. Some sailor stopped and wanted to tell me his war stories and I told him I was not interested.

T: Would you do it again?

G: Yes, I would. That Lee Greenwood song, 'God Bless The USA. I'll stand up next to you and defend her still today. I won't forget the men who died'. I'm a patriotic American.

T: Today when you hear San Diego, what is your reaction?

G: The nights and early marches on the parade ground. Inspections of our clothes.

T: Okinawa.

G: The many close calls I had. I took my family back to Okinawa last year and took them to Kinishi Ridge where my brother was killed

T: Tojo.

G: An evil person that caused millions of people to die. Just like Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin.

T: Franklin Roosevelt.

G: As far as I'm concerned a great man and a great president. He started the CCC program. My mother had 10 or 11 kids at home and washed on a wash board. The CCC program let her buy a washing machine. We milked 4 cows to get enough milk for everybody everyday.

T: Harry Truman.

G: Thankful for him for dropping that atomic bomb. We don't jump on anyone and try to rule them, but we will destroy an evil nation trying to take us over.

T: Sir, this is an excellent interview. I want to thank you for your service and thank you for the interview.

T: Thank you.