

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Telephone Interview with

Mr. B. J. Wilson

Date of Interview: June 19, 2013

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Telephone Interview in progress.

Charlie Simmons: This is Charlie Simmons. Today is the 19th of June, 2013. I am interviewing Mr. B.J. Wilson. This interview is taking place by telephone with me in Fredericksburg, Texas and he is in Charlottesville, Virginia. This interview is in support of the Nimitz Education and Research Center, archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, for the preservation of historical information related to this site.

B.J., if you would please state your name, your place of birth and your date of birth, and we'll take it from there.

Mr. Wilson: My name is B.J. Wilson; the B stands for Billy and J stands for James. I was born in Nashville, Tennessee on October the 22nd, 1924. Lived most of my ... early life in Old Hickory, Tennessee and Madison, Tennessee, and I went off to the war after ... enlisting in the Marine Corps on the 23rd of December, 19 ... of November, 1942 ... of '41.

Charlie Simmons: Okay, were you ... uh, a member of a large family; did your ... did you have siblings?

Mr. Wilson: Uh, there were two sons.

Charlie Simmons: Okay.

Mr. Wilson: My father had been married before and had ... a daughter and two sons by his first marriage.

Charlie Simmons: Okay. And what ... what sort of life did you live? Were you living on a farm, in a city at the time ... while ... while you were growing up?

Mr. Wilson: Well, you couldn't consider Old ... Old Hickory a very big city.

Charlie Simmons: Uh huh.

Mr. Wilson: It's named for ... Andrew Jackson ... as ... Old Hickory ...

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: ... (unintelligible) Hickory. (Unintelligible).

Charlie Simmons: So, it was just a ... just a small town.

Mr. Wilson: Small town about ... four thousand I would think.

Charlie Simmons: Did you go ... all the way through school there in Old Hickory?

Mr. Wilson: No, I didn't. I ... I went through school ... went through the seventh grade there, Old Hickory; moved to Madison and went to school at ... the Madison ... uh, school, elementary school. I can't find the words sometimes.

Charlie Simmons: Okay, yeah, well, I ... I have that trouble, too (chuckles). What year did you graduate from high school then?

Mr. Wilson: I did not graduate from high school until after the war, World War I ... uh, World War II was over.

Charlie Simmons: Oh okay.

Mr. Wilson: I quit in about the ... second year ... of high school, and joined the Marine Corps.

Charlie Simmons: Okay. And how old were you at that time?

Mr. Wilson: Seventeen years, and two months.

Charlie Simmons: Okay, and your ... and your parents gave ... signed a permission for you to ... to join up early?

Mr. Wilson: Yes, they did.

Charlie Simmons: Okay. What made you decide to ... to join the Marine Corps?

Mr. Wilson: I wish I knew. Uh, it seemed the thing to do; seemed like the thing to do at that particular time.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: Uh, I wasn't doing well in school; I wasn't ... paying much attention through school.

Charlie Simmons: (Throat clearing), yeah. Well, what ... what were you doing ... let's see, on December the 7th of 1941? You were in school at the time; were you ... do ... do you remember that date?

Mr. Wilson: I misinformed you. I was not in school at the time ... on December the 7th, 1941; I was at Parris Island on December 7th, 1941.

Charlie Simmons: Oh okay, so you had already enlisted in the Marines then?

Mr. Wilson: Yes.

Charlie Simmons: Oh okay. So, that was before the war actually started. Well, excuse me, I ... I ... misunderstood that. Okay, so you were ... you were in boot camp at Parris Island ... and when ... when the war started?

Mr. Wilson: Yes, I was.

Charlie Simmons: (Chuckle), that's a unique experience because you're the first person I've talked to that's actually been ... was in boot camp. Well, can you tell me what ... what the reaction was ... in ... in your boot platoon when ... when the word came out?

Mr. Wilson: Well, I guess we knew that Japan was a dangerous ... enemy. We knew that ... they are ... were on the war path over in the Orient, and ... we didn't ... it was a surprise to us that they would attack the United States because we were ... a big trading of theirs. Uh, it was just a great surprise ...

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: ... that they would attack us.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah. Well, was there a lot of speculation that ... well, "this means that we're going to be going into war here instead of just serving in a peacetime Marine Corps" then?

Mr. Wilson: Everybody believed it was going to ... go into a great big war ... except me. And I thought they (unintelligible) without any ... any ... much to do about it.

Charlie Simmons: Uh hum. Well, when you joined the Marine Corps, how long did boot camps last at that time?

Mr. Wilson: Well, it lasted for fourteen weeks, I think.

Charlie Simmons: Okay. So, after boot camp was over, uh, what was your assignment?

Mr. Wilson: I was assigned to Charlestown, South Carolina Navy ... orders ... as a guard.

Charlie Simmons: Okay, and how long were you ... did you serve in that duty?

Mr. Wilson: I served in that duty three months and then I asked for a transfer to the Fleet Marine Force.

Charlie Simmons: Okay.

Mr. Wilson: (Unintelligible).

Charlie Simmons: That ... so your ... your transfer was accepted; where did you go then?

Mr. Wilson: Went to Jacksonville, North Carolina, and ... served in F Company, Second Battalion, First Marines.

Charlie Simmons: Okay, First Marines. There ... there was a Marine base in Jacksonville? I wasn't ... wasn't aware of that.

Mr. Wilson: Yes, there was at that time. It ... it's still there, but it's in ... as I understand it, it's ... uh, Airacobras; not Airacobras ... uh, helicopters.

Charlie Simmons: Okay. Okay, so ... there was ... well, there ... there's a Jacksonville Naval Air Station ... I ... I knew, but I didn't realize that there were any ground forces that were ever ... ever assigned to that area. So ... so that ...

Mr. Wilson: Well, I'm not sure that it's the same area that I was in.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: But ... it has the same name.

Charlie Simmons: Okay. So, you got into the First Marines; can you talk a little bit about when you arrived on base? What ... what was your impression of the ... of the camp that you were moving into? Was ... was this a permanent camp with ... with barracks or was ... just a temporary camp with tents and ...?

Mr. Wilson: It was ... in between, and it was ... we had huts, about ten-men huts. Uh, a company (unintelligible), E Company street; E, F,G ... H and I ... F,G,H and I ... uh, one of us had a company street, and the whole regiment had a company street.

Charlie Simmons: Uh huh. Just a little aside here. What ... did you qualify on the rifle range with an '03 Springfield?

Mr. Wilson: (Unintelligible) I shot a ... 2003, that's when they gave me a ... a little medal that said Marksman.

Charlie Simmons: Okay. You ... you didn't ... weren't familiar with using the M-1 Garand rifle at that time, is that correct?

Mr. Wilson: We used that rifle after we were through qualifying with the ... with the Springfield rifle.

Charlie Simmons: Okay, so you qualify with the Springfield, and then you just fired the ... the ... the M-1 for familiarization?

Mr. Wilson: It was ... it was a new ... weapon to the Marine Corps ...

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: ... at that time, and they wanted us to get the feeling of it I would imagine.

Charlie Simmons: Uh huh.

Mr. Wilson: But I don't know that for sure.

Charlie Simmons: Okay, but in normal practice when you were in Jacksonville, you were ... you were carrying an '03, is that ... would that be correct?

Mr. Wilson: That's right.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: That's correct.

Charlie Simmons: Okay, okay. What job were you assigned when you got to the First Marines?

Mr. Wilson: I was assigned as a BARman's assistant. A BAR was a Browning Automatic Rifle.

Charlie Simmons: Right.

Mr. Wilson: Carried a magazine of twenty cartridges and he had twelve magazines on him, and twelve of his magazines on me.

Charlie Simmons: Okay, and was there ... was ... were you set up as a four-man fire team, is that ... at ... at that time?

Mr. Wilson: There were two-man fire team ...

Charlie Simmons: Uh huh.

Mr. Wilson: ... for ... for the BAR.

Charlie Simmons: Okay. And what about a squad ... squad configuration then?

Mr. Wilson: I think the squad configuration should have been about twelve ... or thirteen men.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: There's a Corporal in charge. We had a Corporal, but we didn't have the twelve or thirteen men; I think we had about nine men ...

Charlie Simmons: Okay.

Mr. Wilson: ... in a squad at that time.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah. Did you have a lot of field training while you were in Jacksonville, uh, spent a lot of time in classroom instructions, what was the ... what was life like on the base there for you?

Mr. Wilson: Life on the base wasn't ... wasn't on the base really. We were out in a field most of the time.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: Sleeping in shelter halves. Uh, they had ... the ... the Navy had taken over ... a hundred and eleven thousand acres for their New River ... uh, base, and we used the ... we had a ... perfectly good hutch in the ... on the base, but they wanted us to get the feel of ... living in the open ...

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: ... I guess. Anyway, we did live in the open most of the time; ate out of a field kitchen, and slept in ... pup tents. That was about it.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah. Uh, did you do any amphibious landing ... uh, practices?

Mr. Wilson: We made one, but for some reason, I wasn't on ... duty that day. I had my duty excused that day.

Charlie Simmons: Uh huh. So, how long were you ... were you stationed at Jacksonville?

Mr. Wilson: I would think about four months.

Charlie Simmons: Okay. And ... the ... war was going on that ... by that time with both Germany and Japan; did you have any idea that you were going to be ... shipped to the Pacific or ... or was it still up in the air whether or not you would ... perhaps be fighting against the Germans?

Mr. Wilson: Had no idea that we would go to the Pacific. We were on the east coast, a long way away from that war, and we didn't think we'd ... we thought we'd be up against the Germans.

Charlie Simmons: Uh huh.

Mr. Wilson: Just our general everyday thoughts.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah. Yeah, that ... so, what ... so when you ... when the orders came through was it for the whole regiment to ... to pack up and leave at one time?

Mr. Wilson: Yes, I would imagine so (throat clearing) though I wasn't ... didn't have privy to any knowledge from what we were doing.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah. Okay, so ... so what did the ... what did the ... word to move out then look like from ... from your perspective; were you just told to ... pack up and get on a truck one day or ... uh, what did they tell you?

Mr. Wilson: Well, they ... we had ... a week's notice or maybe a little more than a week, maybe ten days' notice that we were going to the west coast. And we had to get all of our gear marked with F21 and half the company said K and ... whatever their ... initial was and ... put 31 or 11. We caught trains out of ... well, they keep them right on the base, a passenger train which ... was ... Pullman cars came right on the base and picked us up.

Charlie Simmons: Okay. (Throat clearing), had ... had you had leave, had you been able to get home since you had joined the Marines?

Mr. Wilson: Uh, yeah, that was ... that's a tricky question. I had not had leave to get ... to go home, but I did take some leave and went home and told everybody so long and we'd be moving pretty soon (cough).

Charlie Simmons: Okay, then ... when you went on the train ride which I imagine was several days getting ... getting to the west coast ...

Mr. Wilson: It was a five-day train ride.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: Its ...

Charlie Simmons: And did they have any ... any food, and hot food for you to eat on the train, or were you guys ... did you have C-rations?

Mr. Wilson: Oh yes, we had ... we ate in a dining car.

Charlie Simmons: Oh okay. Well, you had it pretty good then.

Mr. Wilson: And we ... yes we did.

Charlie Simmons: Uh, compared to what ... some ... some of the stories I've heard anyhow. Uh, okay, and you got to the west coast ... and where did you ... where did you pull into on the west coast?

Mr. Wilson: We pulled into a slip; I had ... gotten sick in my stomach ... sick to my ... I felt like I ... well, I felt like I was sick and across over in the car that I rode in, railroad car crossed over the San Francisco Bay to the ... where the ... the ships were tied up ...

Charlie Simmons: Uh huh.

Mr. Wilson: ... and went aboard a ship and I got the Corpsman and told him how sick I was, and he ... took me and my ... all my heavy marching order and rifle and so forth to the (unintelligible) ship we were going to go overseas on ... on [USS] George F. Elliott.

Charlie Simmons: Okay. That was a ... transport, APA, type of attack transport?

Mr. Wilson: It was about a twenty-thousand-ton ship. Twenty-two-thousand-ton ship. It was a ... had been a passenger liner.

Charlie Simmons: Oh! Okay.

Mr. Wilson: And it had been a freight liner also.

Charlie Simmons: Okay, so it was a fair ... fairly large vessel then?

Mr. Wilson: It was a large vessel, yes.

Charlie Simmons: Okay, so you got packed aboard ship, and ... what were the accommodations like ... on the Elliott?

Mr. Wilson: (Laughter), well, it was ... about as ... the sleeping quarters were ... over ... overtaxed where you didn't have enough sleeping quarters for everybody to lay down at one time.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: But outside of that, we were ... the food was fairly good. We didn't suffer at all ... or I wouldn't think. We had just do ... guard duty, and we were ... our squad was ... one of the ... squads that stood guard on the anti-aircraft guns and did ... did ... had ... we'd go on ... four the ... four to eight and ... for a week ... eight to twelve and ... twelve to four, around the clock, and then we had a ... a day off. That was ... actually four days on with a day

off of work. I hope you make sense of this ... 'cause it doesn't sound right coming out of my mouth.

Charlie Simmons: Well yeah, well your ... well, because ... all ... all ships run on a ... on a three-watch schedule and each watch is usually four hours long, so ... it makes ... it makes total sense ... that you'd be rotating like that. And then ... and then you'd ... you do get ... time, you know, days off where you're not, you know, having any duty at all. So ... so, how long were ... how long were you in port there in San Francisco?

Mr. Wilson: I would think about fifteen or eighteen days.

Charlie Simmons: Okay. And were ... were they just waiting for all ... for the, I suppose, the other ships in the convoy that were going to ... be getting loaded up and ... before you took off?

Mr. Wilson: I think they were waiting that were ... was going to escort us overseas.

Charlie Simmons: Okay. (Throat clearing), did you get to go on leave then in San Francisco?

Mr. Wilson: No ...

Charlie Simmons: Or ...

Mr. Wilson: ... or leave.

Charlie Simmons: Or no, no, I mean, uh, just ... liberty?

Mr. Wilson: Liberty, I don't think we had overnight liberty, but we had liberty.

Charlie Simmons: Uh huh, okay. Uh, so after a couple of weeks' wait ... your escort ship shows up and ... uh, then what happens?

Mr. Wilson: One afternoon about two o'clock ... pulls in the gangplank and ... tossed ... threw off the ropes and ... backed out of ... uh, I think tugs pulled us out into the ocean.

Charlie Simmons: Uh huh.

Mr. Wilson: Out into the ... uh, current, and we ... set sail from there.

Charlie Simmons: Okay. Were there ... how many ships were ... were with you at that time, do you remember?

Mr. Wilson: I would think about sixteen.

Charlie Simmons: Okay. And did you have any idea of where you were going?

Mr. Wilson: Not an ... idea in the world.

Charlie Simmons: Oh.

Mr. Wilson: Oh, somewhere to the Pacific War ...

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: ... but that's ... that's as much as we knew.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah. And what was it ... well, the ... I know there's a ... when you're sitting around on a ship like that and you've got nothing to do, there's lots of rumors flying around and ... and there's a lot of scuttlebutt going on about what you're going to be doing, where you're going and ... and ... 'cause ... do you remember any of this ... of this speculation that was going around about what was probably going to happen?

Mr. Wilson: Oh, there was lots of speculation about where ... where we were going we're going to Borneo, we're going to ... various islands; we was going to Wake Island and take Wake Island back from the Japanese. Uh, there's all sorts of ... speculation about where we were going, but ... they cleared that up in a day or two; had us all in the mess hall and announced we were going to ... Wellington, New Zealand.

Charlie Simmons: And what was ... what was life at sea for you then for the first ... was this your first time out in the open ocean?

Mr. Wilson: Uh, they (unintelligible) stay on ... four to twelve, eight to four ... eight ... eight to twelve, twelve to four or four to eight.

Charlie Simmons: So, you didn't ... you didn't worry about ... uh, there was no sea sickness? You didn't ... you didn't get into any heavy weather then it sounds like.

Mr. Wilson: Well, we didn't into any really heavy weather, but ... uh, I was sea sick the second night out for about ... for about three hours, I guess it was, two hours, which was the only time I was ever sea sick. And we ... I expected it every time we would put to sea, but it didn't happen.

Charlie Simmons: Well, you've got pretty good sea legs then!

Mr. Wilson: Yeah, I ...

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: ... pretty good sea legs.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah. Well, what was Wellington, New Zealand like?

Mr. Wilson: It was blacked out at night; it was ... low in the day time, low lights in the day time. You could have a ... neon light on, but ... you had to be on low. I don't know ...

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: ... enough about lights to know what that means. But it was ... full of service men, uh, aircraft pilots and gunners, machinists, uh, and Marines, U.S. Marines.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: Uh ...

Charlie Simmons: Is it a pret ... a pretty nice town?

Mr. Wilson: Oh, it was nice; they were ... they were very glad to see us.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah. And what was the New Zealand beer like?

Mr. Wilson: Excuse me?

Charlie Simmons: What was the New Zealand beer like?

Mr. Wilson: I don't know; I never drank a beer while I was there.

Charlie Simmons: Ah! Well, uh, so I understand that you ... the ... the Marines had to spend a lot of their time reloading their transport ships for combat loading ... the ships because the New Zealand workers were on ... were on strike on the docks. Was that ... do you recall that?

Mr. Wilson: I remember ... ship in the ... the cargo ... around and taking it off and loading it back on ...

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: ... and it looked rather foolish to me, but nobody asked me.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah. Yeah, well, you know, I ... well, the way I heard it was when ... when you're ready to make an invasion, the ships have to be loaded a certain way because the things that are going to come off and go to the beach first have to be loaded ... sort of at the ready for the ... first things to be taken out of the hold, uh, and they're not shipped over that way normally and so they had to re ... repack everything because they wanted to count ... what they called combat loading, and they could get ...

Mr. Wilson: (Unintelligible)

Charlie Simmons: ... you guys had to do it because the New Zealand dock workers were on strike, so ... uh, so it sounds like you got to ... you the job there done and ... uh, how long were you in New Zealand?

Mr. Wilson: I think around eighteen days.

Charlie Simmons: Uh huh. And ... so, when you ... left New Zealand, uh, were you ... immediately told where you were go ... where you were headed?

Mr. Wilson: Yes, I think so. I think we were ... found out ... as soon as they ... severed the lines from the dock that we were going to Fiji and make a practice landing there.

Charlie Simmons: Okay.

Mr. Wilson: And we met some more ships; I guess they were west coast Marines, I'm not sure where they were ...

Charlie Simmons: Yeah. And ... you made the practice landing in Fiji then?

Mr. Wilson: I'm ... I was one of the few that got ashore.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: Uh, I don't think the rest ... of the majority got ashore or maybe ... maybe fifty to two hundred of us got ashore.

Charlie Simmons: Well, what ... what ... what happened?

Mr. Wilson: Everything went wrong, everything you can imagine when there's ... two or three groups of ... our ... close together and told to make ... a practice landing.

Charlie Simmons: Huh. Well, were you ... were you ... did you go ashore in a ... in a Higgins boat, a ... a (unintelligible) boat?

Mr. Wilson: Yes. I went ashore in a Higgins boat.

Charlie Simmons: Okay. Had you ever made a landing in a Higgins boat before?

Mr. Wilson: Never had.

Charlie Simmons: Okay. Well, you got to practice that part of it anyhow.

Mr. Wilson: Yeah.

Charlie Simmons: (Chuckles), you had the other two hundred guys ...

Mr. Wilson: (Laughter), yeah.

Charlie Simmons: ... so ... so, they ... they untangled everybody in Fiji then and ... and took off for what ... Guadalcanal?

Mr. Wilson: Yeah.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: And we ran into a ... hurricane and had to close up the galley, so we didn't ... have any full meals. We had just sandwiches ... had ... several times for maybe a day or a day and a half ...

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: ... on our way to Guadalcanal.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah. Well, if it was a hurricane, people were ... probably weren't ready to eat a full meal anyhow, so ...

Mr. Wilson: (Laughter)

Charlie Simmons: (Laughter)

Mr. Wilson: That was true!

Charlie Simmons: Uh, so you pulled in Guadalcanal; were you ... you were ... you were told ahead of time where you were headed, is that correct?

Mr. Wilson: I don't think that I knew ... knew the name of the island.

Charlie Simmons: Uh hum.

Mr. Wilson: I don't think that I knew that because this was ... came as a surprise to me ... that was the name of the island ... later on. Maybe they told somebody and they expected the word to get around, but it just never reached me.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah. Well, you were told though you were going to be going into ... on a ... a Japanese-held ... territory, right?

Mr. Wilson: Oh, oh yes! We knew it was Japanese held!

Charlie Simmons: Yeah, okay. So, you loaded up with ... with live ammunition and ... your ... got your BAR clips ... ready to go?

Mr. Wilson: Yeah.

Charlie Simmons: And you're still Assistant BARman, is that ... is that correct?

Mr. Wilson: Yes. Still Assistant BARman.

Charlie Simmons: Okay. And ... so when you get ... start getting close to the island, were the ... Navy ships bombarding the island at that time?

Mr. Wilson: No, I don't think they ... bombarded the island till ... till the morning that we ... struck.

Charlie Simmons: Okay.

Mr. Wilson: I think it was ... everything was this big surprise to the Japanese.

Charlie Simmons: Oh okay. So, could you describe pulling into the ... into the side of the shore and ... and how ... the ... you got the ship prepared, dropped the ... Peter boats or the ... the Higgins boats over the side and so forth?

Mr. Wilson: Yeah, they ... they had a lot practice unloading it and the crew knew just exactly what to do to get the ... all the boats ... down into the water. But they put us down in our quarters where we could ... (chuckles) have drinks of water and ... and ... physical relief if we needed it.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: And ... kept us down there about two hours longer than they had estimated it would take to get everything straight ... or straight away. We heard the ships firing; we had ... uh, come across ... uh, a battleship and several cruisers. I'm not ... sure of the name of the cruisers here at this ... this time, but ... uh, (pause) well, I won't try to name any of them. Might get me in trouble with somebody (chuckles)!

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: (Pause), when we finally got the word to go over the side, it was about ... ten thirty or eleven o'clock when we should have ... should have gone over about ... eight.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah. So, you go over the side; how far off shore were you at the time?

Mr. Wilson: (Pause), I don't know. It wasn't ... it wasn't a mile ... I don't think it was a mile.

Charlie Simmons: Did you ... did you have to line up in waves or were you just ... did you just load into the ... the Higgins boat and just take off on your own?

Mr. Wilson: We ... we loaded into the Higgins boats and then did ... circles in the ocean ...

Charlie Simmons: Okay.

Mr. Wilson: ... or making right-hand turns ... all the time. And ... uh, we got a slow down message from the ... Master of the Arms or whoever he was. He wasn't Master of Arms, it was ... a Lieutenant Commander ... told us to slow down and not waste all that fuel, and we did. And then we had a ... certain signal; we went flying into the ... Guadalcanal, and I was very surprised ... that we landed near a peninsula that stuck way out into the ocean, and I could see, over ... see trees from my position at the bottom of the boat ... and see the water on the other side. And I kept sneaking my head up just to get a good look at what the place looked like, and the more and more I looked ... the more ... the worse it looked. But I was still delighted that we were going after them and they weren't coming after us.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah. (Throat clearing). Well, that's an interesting ... thought, too. Uh, okay so you've got into the beach ... hit the beach and ... uh, you had what ... one platoon aboard your ... your Higgins boat?

Mr. Wilson: I would imagine it would be about that.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: I saw some people that weren't in our platoon in that boat. I don't know how many ... the boat would hold. I think it was more than a platoon though.

Charlie Simmons: Okay, and so once ... once you got ashore, uh, what ... happened; how did you get coordinated? Were you in the right place; were ... did you have all the other troops around you that you ... that you were planning or ... were you just following ... directions from a platoon leader and ... doing what you were told?

Mr. Wilson: The Fifth Marines ... another regiment was going ... to hit the shore before us; we were ... we were a new ... regiment. The First Marines was a new regiment at that time, and ... we had ... I saw a Corporal from the Fifth Marines, and I asked him, uh, something about, "Where are they (unintelligible)," I think I said, and he said, "They're not going to come out and fight us," and that sounded so good to me.

Charlie Simmons: (Laughter)

Mr. Wilson: That sounded so good! But they would come out and fight; they would fight us with ... in the ocean; they'd fight us on land; they'd fight us in the air. And ... in about twenty, twenty-five minutes we were all lined up ready to go. I think our regular Sergeant was ... in charge of our platoon, and I know the Lieutenant wasn't with us. Uh, we went sailing off through ... through the grassy knoll where we expected to ... meet a lot of opposition, and we expected to have casualties there, but we didn't ... get to the grassy knoll. There was a hill, I think you can find Hill 660 on the maps; we didn't get there that day, and we didn't get there the next day. We got to catching up with ... Company H which was ... one of our ... First Marine, uh, companies and we spent the night with them the second night, and we turned around and went back to the beach on the third day. And I never did get ... set foot on grassy knoll, Hill 660, whatever they wanted to call it.

Charlie Simmons: Well, what were you doing? You were just marching ... in ... into the jungle at the time or ... ?

Mr. Wilson: Well, part of it was jungle. We ... we had to cut our way.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: We had several small rivers to cross; we had a late, late start, and ... I don't remember if there is anything else that held us up, but ... oh, cutting through the jungles was a ... a bad message. You just couldn't cut your way through that; you had to ... slash with your bayonets and ... with ... with the big, jungle knives we had. That slowed us down quite a bit. We only made about half way ... in two days instead of one day ... all the way in one day.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah, man. So, after three days you just went back to the beach?

Mr. Wilson: Went back to the beach; helped around ... unloading the ... the ship that we came on (unintelligible) catching ... the freight off of their boat when the small boats came into land ... we'd take it off of the small boat and put it on trucks and the trucks ran down the side of the island about ... four or five miles ... to a neighborhood where the ... Japanese and their

conscripted ... uh, natives were ... holed up. And ... holed up doesn't sound right ... where they were bivouacked.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah. Okay, and then (cough) after you finished unloading the ship, had you been in ... you personally been in contact yet or had your company been in contact with any ... with any Japanese yet?

Mr. Wilson: Hadn't seen a Japanese anywhere.

Charlie Simmons: Uh huh.

Mr. Wilson: We didn't see a Japanese until the 20th of ... of August ...

Charlie Simmons: And (unintelligible) ...

Mr. Wilson: ... (unintelligible).

Charlie Simmons: ... you actually first landed?

Mr. Wilson: Pardon me?

Charlie Simmons: What was the first date that you first landed then?

Mr. Wilson: We landed on ... uh, August the 7th, 1942.

Charlie Simmons: Okay, and so, it was the 20th before you actually made contact?

Mr. Wilson: The twenty-three made contact with us.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: And was a ... ooh, ...

Charlie Simmons: And what happened then?

Mr. Wilson: They ran into H Company and E Company at the Ilu River, I-I-u, is the way it was spelled then. And it ... it was a stagnant ... waterhole. It had been a running ... might ... might have been running ... in the wet season there. I was never there in the ... in the wet season, but I was there two other times, but I never saw that ... that Ilu River run. And there ... crocodiles in it, too, so they said. Uh, they had us right at the mouth of the Tenaru River, uh, Ilu River and ... eventually, they lost. They ... they lost everything ... about fifty of their number was able to swim, get out and swim away. This was right on the seashore. And I got ... reprimanded two or three times for sticking my head up. And ... but ... it went well for our side. We had ... I think they called (unintelligible) remember having ... twenty-one killed and eighty-one or two ... casualties. My bunkie (sp?),

Thomas, was wounded and ... I took his BAR, so, I become a BAR man by ... by default.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah. Okay, so (throat clearing) so, how long did that ... that action go on?

Mr. Wilson: That action started about two a.m. or maybe a little later than that, maybe ... latest is three a.m.

Charlie Simmons: Uh huh.

Mr. Wilson: And it took until around four in the afternoon before there was no ... return fire.

Charlie Simmons: Okay. Did ... did you then cross the river where the Japanese had come from ... uh, to make sure the other bank is cleared or what ... what ... what happened?

Mr. Wilson: No, I did not cross the river, and none of our company crossed the river.

Charlie Simmons: Uh huh.

Mr. Wilson: And I don't think anybody of the Second Battalion, First Marines crossed the river. I believe they brought up another squad ... uh, troop ... where they were ... from another company ... from somewhere else that ...

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: ... crossed the river 'cause we had been up, uh, two ... nearly twenty hours, I guess it would be.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: And we just ... took what they had ... tins of ... of rations and ... moved back to our old ... old ... place.

Charlie Simmons: Okay. Uh, okay so, after ... after that ... uh, did you go into bivouac, were you doing ... were you running patrols, were you running (unintelligible) ... just standing perimeter watch, were you dug into foxholes on a line? What ... what was ... what was going on?

Mr. Wilson: Well, as soon as we got a permanent place, we dug in.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: (Throat clearing), and we got a permanent place between the ... the coconut trees. The island was in Lever Brothers ... coconut plantation is

what it really was. I think they used that for soap, but I'm not sure what they used it for. We dug in and our ... our squad, the Second squad, was a little bit farther back than the other two squads of our ... of our company ... of our platoon, and they ... the rest of our company was scattered along the beach ... in case we had an ... encounter landing. And ... I don't believe we had anything happen until the second or third night after that. I got shot at ... I was ... which was the first one to be shot at; I thought I was anyway (laughter).

Charlie Simmons: Yeah (cough).

Mr. Wilson: Uh, Japanese came ... came from the other direction ... from the ... north ... northwest, and sent a few snipers in to ... wake us up; keep us from sleeping good, but they didn't do much damage. If they hit anybody, I didn't know it.

Charlie Simmons: Did you ... did ... did somebody take the snipers out then?

Mr. Wilson: No, they sniped at ... at us ... anybody moving. We had ... usually had on white t-shirts and slept in our underwear, and their gunners, they just see you ... standing up or would see that white shirt, they would shoot at it, but as far as I know, I didn't ... nobody was ever hit by a sniper.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: Uh, they would snipe at us for a while and then they'd go somewhere else and snipe. You could ... next day if you wanted to see where they'd been, you could ... find where they used spikes to climb the trees.

Charlie Simmons: Huh. Yeah. Well, and ... so, you were just holding a line, and ... in a position there for ... for a period of time.

Mr. Wilson: That's what ... that's what it amounted to, yes.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah. And ... did ... did that go on for quite some time ... would ... how long was it before you ... uh, had to move or before the Japanese decided to come ... come move you?

Mr. Wilson: I think we stayed there three weeks.

Charlie Simmons: Uh huh.

Mr. Wilson: And the Third Battalion was behind us ... also on the Ilu River; they were on the Ilu River ... the river we landed near ... near (unintelligible). And we relieved them and they took our position along the beach then ...

Charlie Simmons: Okay.

Mr. Wilson: ... 'cause they felt our ... position was ... was less dangerous to the ... operation than ... the Third Battalion was.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah. So, you just swapped ... swapped positions with the Third Battalion then?

Mr. Wilson: That's right.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah, okay.

Mr. Wilson: That's right.

Charlie Simmons: And ... and what was your new position like then?

Mr. Wilson: New position wasn't as well worked as we had done ... in digging in on the beach, so we dug in, again, and fixed our places as well as we could. Some of us had overhead cover, and that lasted about three weeks and then they decided we was going to move on over to the ... Tenaru River which was ... just across the field, and it wasn't a very wide field, but we took in a little more territory. And we stayed there until ... the 164th Infantry, I think that was the number, the Americal Division ... came in and relieved us. Then we moved up into the hill country to the west to the northwest. The island itself is sort of northwest to southeast. We moved way up ... not all the way to the ... where the Japanese were, but we were backing up some fifty caliber machine guns, and ... taking the place of a mortar squad that belonged to H Company, and we stayed there the rest of our time on Guadalcanal. We left the island on the 23rd of December and taken off by ... small boat and went aboard the [USS] General [s/b President?] Jackson. I'm not sure that it was General Jackson ... I'm not ... but it was the Jackson.

Charlie Simmons: Uh huh, and was this another converted liner or ... two ...

Mr. Wilson: (Unintelligible), yeah, it was a converted liner.

Charlie Simmons: Okay. Uhm, and ... where did the Jackson take you?

Mr. Wilson: It took us to ... uh, Espiritu Santos which was one of the new Hebrides islands. And ...

Charlie Simmons: Well, well when ...

Mr. Wilson: I ...

Charlie Simmons: ... I'm ... I'm sorry ... I want to back up a little, B.J. When ... at this time, August, September, October, November, December ... you've been in the jungle pretty much solid for ... it's an awful long time. What ... what did it feel like just knowing that you were going to get out of there? I mean, were ... were ... does ... was there a lot of malaria, a lot of disease in your company ... trench foot?

Mr. Wilson: There ... there wasn't ... it wasn't as much as you would expect (cough), but ... most everyone knew ... who ... was (unintelligible) knew when he ... he was getting sick and went right straight to the sick bay, and stayed there. And his squad leader had to find out where he was and ... and ... he called in presence and ... all the (unintelligible) all ... none ... no duty or something like that.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: Uh, it was one or two a week just about every week.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah. Yeah, and were you ... were you taking anti-quinine ... uh, tablets, atabrine or ...

Mr. Wilson: Atabrine, we were taking atabrine with every meal.

Charlie Simmons: Okay.

Mr. Wilson: No, no.

Charlie Simmons: Or ...

Mr. Wilson: One in the morning and one in the afternoon.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah. Yeah, so I ... I guess from the ... the climate standpoint, it was pretty ... pretty grim. Was it ... did it rain a lot while you there?

Mr. Wilson: We had ... spurts of rain (coughs), and your poncho was your only defense.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: Along the beach it was very sandy, easy to dig. We dug in and had ourselves a ... as dry a place as we could ... could get it.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah. Did ... well, you were in the ... in the coconut ... palms there; I, uh, understand that ... some of the guys actually got injured or killed by ... falling coconuts. Did you have anybody in your outfit (chuckles) that got ... nailed by coconuts?

Mr. Wilson: No, I don't think so.

Charlie Simmons: Okay.

Mr. Wilson: I would be very surprised if anybody got ... killed by falling coconuts.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah, okay. Well maybe ... maybe it was on another island, but there was ... there was ... supposedly some casualties. Well, so ... okay, I'm sorry, I interrupted your train of thought there. You were ... you were on the Jackson, then you'd gotten up to Espiritu Santos, and were you able to get some R&R while you were there?

Mr. Wilson: Yes, uh, we had a few shows that came by, USO shows, and ... we were waiting for the USS Tryon to take us ... to Melbourne ... for a nine-month rest ... which wasn't ... really a rest; it was ... a difficult situation.

Charlie Simmons: How ... how's that?

Mr. Wilson: Well, the Ninth Division, the Australian Ninth Division came home, and they didn't like it (chuckles) that the Marines were ... up and down Main Street and (unintelligible) Street, and ... all the streets of Mel ... Melbourne. So, we had a little ... get together for them. It worked out alright. It was a little strange at first.

Charlie Simmons: (Throat clearing), so you were in Melbourne for nine months then?

Mr. Wilson: We ... we were in Melbourne from the 15th of January until about the 12th of October, that would ... that would be about nine months, wouldn't it?

Charlie Simmons: Yeah, right. Uh, yeah, and that ... yeah, that's a ... that's a pretty long time where you just ... were you just training during that ... that time?

Mr. Wilson: Oh, appendix ... erupted, and I had that out ... at the Army's 4th General Hospital. Everybody had malaria and ... a lot of people had malaria and ... when they quit ... quit serving their ... well, they kept on that atabrine ...

kept us on atabrine there. Uh, some people wouldn't take their atabrine and they ... they got sick of malaria. Uh ... it ... it wasn't something that we could do anything about. I'm reasonably sure we couldn't do anything about it.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah. Yeah, so ... were you training; did you do any amphibious landings, uh, any ... I ... I guess, I just wondering what ... what you ... what ... what sort of occupied your time for nine months there?

Mr. Wilson: We were stationed first in the Melbourne Cricket Ground, in the stands, the grandstands of the Melbourne Cricket Ground. All of the First Marine Regiment was in there.

Charlie Simmons: Wow!

Mr. Wilson: Plus some headquarters was there, too. And then we moved to ... Camp ... an Australian Dandenong, D-a-n-d-e-n-o-n-g, I think is right. Uh, Dandenong was not enough to be ... camp; it was just tents.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah. And so, you were there until October ... uh, this would have been '44, is that correct?

Mr. Wilson: (Pause), let's see, '43 would have ...

Charlie Simmons: Okay, well you ... well you landed in ... in Guadalcanal on August of ... , let's see ...

Mr. Wilson: '42.

Charlie Simmons: ... '42, okay, so you ... so this is October of '43 then.

Mr. Wilson: Yeah.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah okay. And ... so where did you ... where did you ship out to when you ... when you left there?

Mr. Wilson: We shipped out, the First Marines, was ... which outfit I was in shipped out to Good Enough [s/b Goodenough] Island. It's two words, G-o-o-d E-n-o-u-g-h, but I ... that's all I've always thought of it being spelled like that, but you might want to look it up.

Charlie Simmons: Okay.

Mr. Wilson: And the rest of the Marines ... went up to New Guinea which was ... oh, four hundred miles up ... up there ... New Guinea from where we were.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: And then on the ... 26th of December ... we went across the strait there between New Britain and New Guinea and ... took this ... took the ... tip of New Guinea, uh, New ... New Britain as an American fortress I guess you'd say. We didn't have much fighting. We didn't have much ... we had some P-40s that flew over every morning, and we were on guard duty all day. And if ... uh, the Japanese sent a bomber or two, the P-40s would take off. They wouldn't let us fool around ... look at the planes like we ... wanted to. We had ... the Seventh Marines had a ... hard ... some hard battles there in the ... when they first landed.

Charlie Simmons: Uh huh. (Throat clearing)

Mr. Wilson: We landed ... down the coast ... up the coast I guess I should say, up the coast ... about ... fifteen miles from the end of the island, and ... climbed a mountain and I guess you wouldn't call it mountain ... climbed the ... hills and ... dug in in a defensive position and stayed there about fifteen, eighteen days, I think. Maybe a little more than that. Maybe as much as ... maybe as much as thirty-five days.

Charlie Simmons: Okay.

Mr. Wilson: Oh! You just wanted Guadalcanal, didn't you?

Charlie Simmons: Uh, no, no; I ... I want your whole ... your ... your whole war history!

Mr. Wilson: Oh!

Charlie Simmons: Until ... till you get out of the Marines. Uh, the ... the only ... Guadalcanal was the only thing that I had been told that you ... that, you know, that you had participated in, but that was ... no, the fighting ... I know the ... uh, Cape Gloucester and ... and New Britain and ... there ... there was an awful lot of fighting in the Pacific ... uh, outside of Guad ... Guadalcanal after that. Uh, and so you ... you were ... just basically in a defensive position there, and the ... did you have any contact with the Japanese at ... during that time or ... or was it pretty much ... pretty placid duty?

Mr. Wilson: Uh ... G Company's ... I think it was G Company ... had ... an attack with ... a platoon of Japanese which they easily mopped up, but Marine Gunner Robertson who had been a Sergeant at New River was killed in that battle.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: I don't think they lost ... but just a few men, five or six, something like that. And then we moved down ... after that one battle ... uh, we moved down right to the point of the ... of the ... of Cape Gloucester.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah. Yeah, well there was a ... there was a lot of nasty ... uh, fighting on ... Cape Gloucester. I mean, there ... there was, as I understand it, there was a lot of really swampy terrain that they had to ... they had to move through to get to the Japanese positions, and ...

Mr. Wilson: Yes, yeah, that's true.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: That's true; I wasn't in any ... in ... and never saw it before the ... battle was cleaned up ...

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: ... when they hauled the bodies away and things like that.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: I never saw any of that fighting.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah, yeah. So ... so you stayed there, uh, basically for a ... a couple of months and then ... what ... what ... what happened; what did your unit do after that?

Mr. Wilson: We were pulled back ... and I don't know that we were ... was in any danger of having the Japanese hit us. They hadn't been able to really ... come and bomb us like they did at Guadalcanal.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: At Guadalcanal we had an air raid almost every day, and ... but they couldn't do that ... when we was on the island that they flew from. They couldn't ... they just couldn't do that.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah, well, they were flying out of Rabaul, too, that was their ...

Mr. Wilson: (Unintelligible)?

Charlie Simmons: ... their main ... air base there.

Mr. Wilson: Yes.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah, okay.

Mr. Wilson: They were very close!

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: About a hundred miles; could have ... put them right over us. And I think they were twelve-hundred miles flights ... from Rabaul to Guadalcanal.

Charlie Simmons: Uh ... well, I ... I think they had ... perhaps the US air power had dented the Japanese ... air power by then, too, because they were ... they were inflicting some pretty heavy casualties and the Japanese couldn't replace their planes and air crews as ... as easily as the Americans could.

Mr. Wilson: Yes, yes ... uh ... we had ... we outproduced them five to one or something like that ...

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: ... we used to say. Uh, we stayed there ... under bad conditions; not the best of conditions and then moved back to the Russell Islands to Pavuvu, P-a-v-u-v-u ... is the way it's spelled.

Charlie Simmons: And ... what was ... what was life like that ... there? What sort of camp were you set up in?

Mr. Wilson: We got the worst island in the whole Solomons.

Charlie Simmons: (Laughter)

Mr. Wilson: It was ... pick up ... all the old coconuts that had been laying on the ground two or three years and pile them up ... and clean up and put ... put up our tents and do all that work ... and it was ... it was just a mess. Finally, when we got it cleaned up, they wanted us to go ... well, they didn't ... just want us to go ... we went to ... Peleliu, P-e-l-e-l-i-u.

Charlie Simmons: Oh yeah. Yeah, now that was ... that was a pretty ... a pretty ugly battle.

Mr. Wilson: Yes, and ...

Charlie Simmons: That was ... one of the ... one of the worst ones I think from all the people that ... that were in it that talk about it. Uh, so you moved up to Peleliu, and ... uh, what ... tell ... just ... okay, I guess start from the start and ...

when you got to Peleliu what ... what did you do; what is your ... your company do?

Mr. Wilson: Well, I jumped over the side of ... out of the amphib tractor when we hit the shore.

Charlie Simmons: Did ... were you in some of the first waves or had there already been waves going in in front of you?

Mr. Wilson: There might have been one wave ahead of us.

Charlie Simmons: Okay. So, were you ... were you coming in through the airfield?

Mr. Wilson: What was the question again, please?

Charlie Simmons: The ... were ... there was an air ... there was an airfield there; some of the ... some of the Marines landed ... right on the ... right at the airfield and had to cross the runway; was that ... the part you were landing at or ...?

Mr. Wilson: Yeah, I ... I landed right ... right near the airfield.

Charlie Simmons: Uh huh.

Mr. Wilson: When you say right near the airfield, it was ... still a ... I guess a half a mile from the shore to the airfield.

Charlie Simmons: Okay, and so you ... you ... you got out of the amphibious; were you ... you were in a LVT?

Mr. Wilson: Yeah, I was ... LVT ...

Charlie Simmons: Okay.

Mr. Wilson: ... riding a vehicle tractor, yes. I jumped out ... went out of the back ...

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: ... and went around. We landed ... looking almost into the mouth of ... of some sort of a gun; it was a ... pos ... position going underneath a tree, and you could see the guy in there; see his ... chin straps. I didn't shoot him ... because I thought he was a Japan ... uh, might have been a Marine.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: And I crawled up ... back into the tractor ... and went out the back of the tractor, and up the (unintelligible) right side of the tractor and across the top of the tractor. And ... called to the guy inside the ... the pit who was a really an observation post, and I called to him and ... told him to ... better

tell me who he is or tell me his name or ... the ... secret word or something, and I didn't get any information out of him. He never answered ... answered me at all, but I didn't go to ... so far as to shoot him 'cause he still might have been a Marine.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: He might have had his ears stopped up. Anyway, I crawled up there about fifteen feet, and ... there's some fighting going on to my left ... all ... all F Company ... that were left and I made a dash across the ... the place and up over ... uh, some ... built in trenches. They had put up concrete and then put ... dirt against it and covered it over and let it go natural. And they had shooting ports that ... they could shoot at us from any of those places. I stayed there trying to get somebody's attention, and I didn't get anybody's attention, but a couple of guys I didn't know came down, and ... started arguing ... well, they argued with me but that didn't do any good. I still didn't change my mind about ... going in there ... walking through there, and ...

Charlie Simmons: Well, what ... what were they arguing about?

Mr. Wilson: Whether we should go in ... and clean out the ... the ... that long tunnel.

Charlie Simmons: Okay.

Mr. Wilson: I wasn't going to go in by myself, and ... and ... it seems like a mute question right now, but it was ... pretty important at the time.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah!

Mr. Wilson: Then I ... two guys came along from my company and I knew them well, and I started off with them, and they jumped over a log that was ... got in the way, and I ... got hung up on the log; it was ... rotting away, and by the time I turned around, the two that came up from ... from somebody that I didn't know ... were gone and the two that came from our company ... were gone. So, I was standing out there all alone, and that's kind of a ... nude feeling to ...

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: ... to find yourself all alone. And I ... I came back (pause) and crossed over that ... where that pit was where the ... covered over ... uh, I can't think of the name of thing now.

Charlie Simmons: Well, it was ... be like a pillbox or ...?

Mr. Wilson: It was like a long ... long pillbox; it would have led to a lot of pillboxes.

Charlie Simmons: Okay. So, it was just sort of like a ... like a deep trench that was ... concreted then ... then?

Mr. Wilson: Yeah, that's what it was; it was like a deep trench that was concreted, but it was covered over at the top, too.

Charlie Simmons: Oh okay.

Mr. Wilson: And I wondered how they got enough breathe to keep breathing in there. Anyway, I came back of there ... and there was still a lot of fighting on the beach.

Charlie Simmons: Okay, so you got back to the beach, and did you find some guys from your company then?

Mr. Wilson: (Pause), I don't think I did. I hadn't ever ... I never inventoried this and ... try to figure it out ...

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: ... but I don't think I ran into anybody.

Charlie Simmons: Oh. That's just ... nice having somebody around you and not being all out by yourself, I guess ...

Mr. Wilson: Yes.

Charlie Simmons: ... at ... at least.

Mr. Wilson: And ... yeah.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: And ... I don't ... I don't know what happened to the rest of that day. Well, we landed late; it might have been time for chow.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: I don't ... I don't remember the rest of that day. The following day ... we went across, oh, about four o'clock that afternoon ... we started out ... with everybody closing in on ... wherever the capital of this ... of the island

was, and ... got across the first of the runways ... air ... air ... airfield runways ...

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: ... with the big, round ... turn-around places for the airplane at the end of the runway, and ... crawled up there about thirty yards into the jungles ... about ... generally had been cleared away near the airfield, and we went on ... and went into the jungle about ... thirty or forty feet and bedded down for the night. But I ... the next morning ... I caught a ride on an amphibious tractor and here ... say, "Take me the right way ... F Company was working," and ... we rode on up a powerline, what looked like a powerline to me because it was a straight cut of ... where the jungle had been cleared away, and ... uh, then the trac ... tractor hit a land mine and blew the track off of the ... left ... left track off of the tractor.

Charlie Simmons: So, you were okay though?

Mr. Wilson: I was okay ...

Charlie Simmons: And the crew?

Mr. Wilson: ... I was try ... trying to get the rear ramp down...

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: ...so, I didn't have to go off over the top, go out over the top.

Charlie Simmons: So ... so, you got out of ... out of the LVT okay, and ...

Mr. Wilson: I got out of the L ... LVT alright, but I didn't get the ... ramp down and the guys sitting in the front were urging me to get it down, the two, the driver and his assistant.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: And I got out of the tractor; I jumped up on the ... gun ... rail and sort of rolled over and fell down and ... and caught myself with my hands and knees (pause). I think ... I think I ... (pauses) ... I think I was ... right into a Japanese soldier, right there on that track ...

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: ... right ... right behind where the tractor was sitting. And (pause) then I got back in the tractor.

Charlie Simmons: Well, what did you do with the Japanese soldier?

Mr. Wilson: I think I killed him.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah, okay.

Mr. Wilson: Got back in the tractor and tried ... tried again to get the rear ramp down. There was two or three guys sitting in there wasn't doing anything, and ... at that time, the Lieutenant, the company executive officer, is who he was ... I can't think of his name. I've seen him since the war was over, was ... jumped up on the rail and had his little carbine in his left hand, and he was holding it out away from him, and two or three Japanese bullets came and ... one of them hit him ... right in the elbow. (Pause), and this was the stickiest position I'd ever been in. I went back ... and rolled out ... laid down on the ... inside ... the ... left ... rolling ... side, and rolled off and caught the ground for the second time, and ran around behind ... the tractor (pause). At that time, I didn't wait for anybody to come out of the tractor. I went into the woods and ... and looked to see if there was anybody there, anybody getting out, and I didn't see anybody. I did eventually run into the, in the hospital, I ran into the guy that was the driver of that tractor. I think that was in San Diego Naval Hospital.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: And he said he was alright; he ... he wasn't ... he had a ... something wrong with his knee. And I (pause) I ... I ran around ... I ... was on the verge of losing my nerve there. I ran around to the ... the side, to the other side to the ... right side of the tractor and ... that Lieutenant with his ... arm shot ... was walking ahead of me holding his arm, and he went right straight to a ... aide station or ... and they'd put up in there, and I went on ... beyond him, and F Company was coming, my company, was coming ... building up near ... two (pause) air raid pits; they were well, well placed and they wouldn't photograph from the air because they had ... stuff over the roof of them. Uh, (pause) ... now ... we waited for some tractors ... from a tractor ... for a tractor ... for an amphibious tractor to come and ... and go with us ... up the ... back road. They had a lot of fight ... fighting

along the front road which was on the ... sand at the foot of the island; he was on the left side. And we took the right side, well took ... took the middle really, and started up there because there was water on beyond us. Started up there ... and we came to a ... bombed out building; it had a concrete floor and the walls ... two by fours standing up ... and a second floor above that ... and just two by fours. And I snapped a few shots ... off of that ... off of the floor, on the second floor, but I don't think I hit anything.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: Then (pause) really, somebody from our company was gone ahead, and I thought I've been ... I haven't been in any action at all, and I thought I'd better get ... started here. And I followed him, and we turned sort of to the left; we hit a ... hit a farm-type road ... just two ruts in the ground where ... once a week or something like that a tractor would run over it. And he ... went ahead of me ... and got shot in the hip. Almost the same time that I got shot in the right hand (pause), and I ducked back behind a tree where I had stepped out from it ... when I got shot. And I went ... I tried to ... to get a ... tourniquet around my wrist, but I ... I couldn't do it. And I went on over and Joe Cassidy (sp?) ... who ... was a New York lawyer ... he lives in Florida now or he did, uh, he cut a ... string off of my pack and rubbed my ... just above the muscle as a tourniquet, and I walked back about ... we walked ... I walked back ... the same way we came. And ... there were some Seventh Marines coming ... to relieve the First Marines. By then we was pretty badly shot up, and they told me that there was a first aid ... spot ... uh, in the trees not far away and pointed me in the right direction, and they took some of my hand grenades. And that's ... that's ... that's all I think they took with ... one of them asked for an ... ammunition, but ... I had thirty caliber ammunition and he had a ... tommy gun.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah (throat clearing), yeah.

Mr. Wilson: When I got to the ... where the doctor was working with some ... wounded Marines, down in a ditch, and I thought I could walk to the beach from

there. And I said to this other guy was waiting to be ... bandaged ... if he wanted to walk, and the doctor interrupted me and says, "I'm in charge here; you'll walk when I tell you to walk." So, I just sat there, and ... that's (unintelligible) about twenty minutes, an amphibious tractor drove up and spun itself around on the left tread and let the ... watertight door on the back down, all the walking wounded got on there. And two or three ... stretcher cases got on there; the doctor and a corpsman loaded them on. And we took off for the beach. And I had to wait ... had to wait about an hour to ... before I could ... (pause) ... before I could get to ... on the ... onto the ... Tryon. The Tryon was the ship that I ... got for ... hospitals, hospital personnel ship, HP, hospital personnel ship, and they put me lower three. That was the end of my war. By the time I got over it, by the time I got ... I lost my middle finger ... where the bullet had gone ... ricocheted off my rifle and through that finger.

Charlie Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: And that's ... that was the end of it. That was the end of my war.

Charlie Simmons: Wow.

Mr. Wilson: You know we've talked for an hour and a half?!

Charlie Simmons: Yeah, well ... you've got ... a very fascinating story, B.J. That ... that really was. The ... yeah, Pele ... Peleliu, I mean, Guad ... Guadalcanal was ... was a pretty bitter struggle, a lot of it, because ... it was ... the situation was in doubt for such a long time that nobody really knew who was going to win that battle because the U.S. Navy wasn't strong enough to keep the Japanese away, and ... then Peleliu was just a blood bath. I mean, they ... there, you know, there's stories about that ... that was ... uh, one of the bitterest fights, uh, you know, yard for yard. I think we took more casualties there than almost any other island probably except ... uh, Tarawa. And so that's ... that's pretty ... pretty fascinating story. Well, uh, yeah, an hour and a half, but it was ... it's just ... it's been a ... it's been a very ... a very good story, and I really appreciate you ... spending this

time with us. But you ... I guess you took a ... hospital ship back to the States or a transport back to the States after ... after that?

Mr. Wilson: I took a transport back to the States.

Charlie Simmons: Uh huh, and ... then you got a ...

Mr. Wilson: (Unintelligible)

Charlie Simmons: ... did you just get a medical discharge then when you got back?

Mr. Wilson: No, no. I got a ... a ... I don't ... I ... I got regular duty when I got back to the States.

Charlie Simmons: Oh, you did?! Well, you ...

Mr. Wilson: (Unintelligible)

Charlie Simmons: ... at ... with ... with no ... you ... you lost a finger and they still ... they still declared you fit for duty then?

Mr. Wilson: Yeah.

Charlie Simmons: Well, it wasn't your trigger finger, I guess, with the Marines that's the only finger you'd need.

Mr. Wilson: (Laughter)

Charlie Simmons: (Laughter)

Mr. Wilson: I guess ... I guess so!

Charlie Simmons: (Laughter), so ... gosh I ... I'd ... I ... I want to say again thank you very much. I ... I do appreciate your story; I appreciate your patience in ... in working through this with us, and ...

Mr. Wilson: I'm glad to do it.

Charlie Simmons: ... I ... I want to thank you for what you did for the country, too. I ... we don't say that enough.

(end of interview)

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CD – #OH03937 – Mr. B. J. Wilson
Transcribed by: K. Matras
Houston, TX
February 8, 2020