

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

An interview with

2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Kenneth A. Matthews

1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division

1<sup>st</sup> Marine Regiment Okinawa

March 26, 2014

Mr. Misenhimer: My name is Richard Misenhimer, today March 26, 2014 I am interviewing Mr. Kenneth A. Matthews by telephone 361-992-0801. His address is 5445 S Alameda #25C Sunchase Apartments Corpus Christi, TX 78412 . This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War, the Nimitz Education and Research Center, for the preservation of the historical information related to World War II. Alright, Ken I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today and I want thank you for your service to our country during World War II.

Mr. Matthews: Thank you

Mr. Misenhimer: What is your birthday?

Mr. Matthews: April 8, 1922.

Mr. Misenhimer: Where were you born?

Mr. Matthews: I was born in Hugo, OK.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Mr. Matthews: I had one brother.

Mr. Misenhimer: Was he in World War II?

Mr. Matthews: I don't think he was I can't remember.

Mr. Misenhimer: Now the first thing I need to do is read you the agreement with the museum to make sure this is okay with you?

Agreement Read

Mr. Misenhimer: Is that okay with you?

Mr. Matthews: That is okay with me.

Mr. Misenhimer: The next thing I want to do is get an alternative contact. Sometimes several years down the road we try to get back contact with those that have moved. Do you have a son, or daughter, or someone we can contact to find you if we needed to.

Mr. Matthews: Well they don't live in Corpus, the best one to contact would be Douglas A. Matthews. His phone number is 830-305-5421. He lives in Seguin.

Mr. Misenhimer: Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Matthews: I went to Corpus Christi High school, now Miller High School.

Mr. Misenhimer: What year did you graduate there?

Mr. Matthews: I graduated in 1939.

Mr. Misenhimer: What did you do when you graduated?

Mr. Matthews: I went to the University of Texas. I played football at the University of Texas and when I played football in Corpus in 1938 and the best number 2 back of all time from Corpus Christi High. Lettered in football, track, and in basketball. When I played at the University of Texas we played in the Cotton Bowl, we played Oklahoma and beat them seven to nothing and I made the touchdown. Then after that I went and joined the Marine Corps.

Mr. Misenhimer: When did you join the Marine Corps?

Mr. Matthews: Must have been 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer: Now you grew up during the depression. How did the depression affect you and your family?

Mr. Matthews: The depression in no way hurt us.

Mr. Misenhimer: Why was that?

Mr. Matthews: Well I guess because of a normal life.

Mr. Misenhimer: How did you choose the Marines?

Mr. Matthews: I just thought they were the greatest.

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

Mr. Matthews: Sure. Never forget it.

Mr. Misenhimer: How did you hear?

Mr. Matthews: From everybody, the radio, and everything else.

Mr. Misenhimer: When you heard that how do you think that would affect you?

Mr. Matthews: I thought that maybe we wouldn't have to go to war, I wanted France to save our people and our country.

Mr. Misenhimer: So when you went into the Marines you went to Parris Island. Is that what you said for your boot camp?

Mr. Matthews: Boot Camp was Parris Island.

Mr. Misenhimer: How was that boot camp?

Mr. Matthews: Terrible. Never forget it. They teach you everything, I tell you. After boot camp I was glad to go into combat.

Mr. Misenhimer: What all did they do to you in boot camp?

Mr. Matthews: They worked you 24 hours a day.

Mr. Misenhimer: What kind of weapons training did you have there?

Mr. Matthews: I think we had the M-1 rifle.

Mr. Misenhimer: Any machine guns or anything like that?

Mr. Matthews: When I became an officer and went in combat I took an M-1 rifle instead of a pistol.

Mr. Misenhimer: When you finished boot camp then where did you go?

Mr. Matthews: I went to Quantico I think.

Mr. Misenhimer: What did you do there?

Mr. Matthews: I became an Officer at that time. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant.

Mr. Misenhimer: You went through OTS Officer training school.

Mr. Matthews: Correct.

Mr. Misenhimer: When did you graduate there?

Mr. Matthews: I don't know.

Mr. Misenhimer: After you got your commission then what happen?

Mr. Matthews: Well they sent us to Okinawa. April 1, 1945. I was a Regimental Intelligence officer for the first Marines first division.

Mr. Misenhimer: What company were you in?

Mr. Matthews: I wasn't in a company I was in the regiment. I was a Regiment Intelligence Officer working with commanding officers taking orders to three battalions at night.

Mr. Misenhimer: Tell me about the trip over to Okinawa. How did you get over there?

Mr. Matthews: We took a ship over there.

Mr. Misenhimer: How was that trip over?

Mr. Matthews: Pretty rough.

Mr. Misenhimer: Much sea sickness?

Mr. Matthews: I will tell you one thing I will never forget the first night on Okinawa. You want me to tell you about it?

Mr. Misenhimer: Yes sir, tell me about it.

Mr. Matthews: At 3 o'clock at night when its pitch dark, the commanding officer called me up and said to me, "Matthews, I want you to take orders for what I want the three battalion to do in the morning." I said, "Yes sir." He gave me the orders. Then I said, "Sir where are we located?" He said, "I don't know!" I said, "Oh my God I got out there and I thought the Japs are going to shoot me or Americans, you run we have trigger happy marine." They will shoot me what should I do. I sat down and thought for a while and I thought well I will sing "The eyes of Texas are upon you all the live long day." "And I made it to all three battalion and <sup>gave them</sup> their orders and I was sure lucky.

Mr. Misenhimer: I understand the instructions were at night to shoot first then ask questions later.

Mr. Matthews: That's was at night, you know.

Mr. Misenhimer: Then what did you do after that?

Mr. Matthews: Well I did a lot of things, it was peaceful after that. I don't know the war was over after that.

Mr. Misenhimer: They were fighting went on in Okinawa for about 6 or 8 weeks.

Mr. Matthews: Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer: So what are some other things that happened to you on Okinawa?

Mr. Matthews: I don't know. I just remember the first night and I remember the Japanese shooting at me and me shooting the Japanese.

Mr. Misenhimer: There had to be some other things that you did over there.

Mr. Matthews. Probably, but I don't remember all of them.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you ever get into any fights with the Japanese?

Mr. Matthews: I shot them before they shot me. Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer: How did that happen?

Mr. Matthews: Well, I'm always going by myself and there was always the Japanese shooting at me. After the first night I shoot back at them. Luckily I always killing them. I was wounded on Okinawa, but not by enemy fire. I fell down Wilson's ridge. Injured my left leg or one of my legs from falling down that ridge.

Mr. Misenhimer: Now I understand the Marines went North on Okinawa. Is that right?

Mr. Matthews: I haven't looked at Okinawa for a long time. I couldn't tell you.

Mr. Misenhimer: There was a place called Naha were you around Naha at any time?

Mr. Matthews: I remember the name, but I don't remember Naha. Nope.

Mr. Misenhimer: There was a lot of fighting there. Did your outfit lose many men?

Mr. Matthews: Yes quite a few. I don't know how many hundreds or thousands. There 2,200 wounded so many killed. I don't know how many.



Mr. Misenhimer: There were several Marine divisions on Okinawa.

Mr. Matthews: Yes, correct.

Mr. Misenhimer: The 1<sup>st</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> I know for sure and maybe to the 5<sup>th</sup>. I don't know.

Mr. Matthews: I don't know either.

Mr. Misenhimer: You don't recall anything else that happened on Okinawa?

Mr. Matthews: No I truly don't. I remember at night when I'm sleeping. Then I figured it out on the next day. I guess it's because of my age. I'm getting old.

Mr. Misenhimer: Now as an intelligence officer. What all did you do as an intelligence officer?

Mr. Matthews: Everything the commanding officer asked me to do.

Mr. Misenhimer: What were some of those other things he asked you to do?

Mr. Matthews: I don't remember.

Mr. Misenhimer: Then when you left Okinawa where did you go?

Mr. Matthews: I went to California. They sent me to California. I can't remember that base in California's name.

Mr. Misenhimer: You didn't go to Japan then?

Mr. Matthews: No. Oh that's right, I'm sorry I went to China. They sent us to China and we sent the Japanese back to Japan.

Mr. Misenhimer: Tell me about that.

Mr. Matthews: Well the Chinese people were really nice to us. They were real nice because we were doing them a real big favor.

Mr. Misenhimer: What was your job there?

Mr. Matthews: I had Captain and with the Japanese people, everyday they would contact me and I tell them what to do. We would put them on ships send and them back to Japan or certain things.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you have any problems with the Japanese there?

Mr. Matthews: No they were very nice.

Mr. Misenhimer: You put them on ships and sent them back to Japan?

Mr. Matthews: Correct.

Mr. Misenhimer: What are some other things that happened in China?

Mr. Matthews: I can't remember. It was very wonderful they were very nice.

Mr. Misenhimer: Then what happened?

Mr. Matthews: I think I went to California, but I can't remember the date. I went to California. I can't remember all I did over there. You remember the whole war, but you don't remember what happened after the war.

Mr. Misenhimer: What are some other things you remember from the war?

Mr. Matthews: Shooting and being shot at. I tell you one thing we were glad to see was when one of our planes came over and dropped bombs on the Japanese. Oh that was wonderful.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you see any of the Kamikaze's hit any of the ships over there?

Mr. Matthews: Oh yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer: Tell me about that.

Mr. Matthews: Well we had these planes that would shoot down the Kamikaze. Boy they sure did shoot them. They were wonderful. A man and I hang out with in Corpus Christi everyday he wasn't in World War II but he was in combat. I don't remember where but he was in the Air force and I told him how wonderful the Air force was Okinawa.

Mr. Misenhimer: Was that Mr. Westergren?

Mr. Matthews: No his name is Bill Hudson.

Mr. Misenhimer: You were with Michael Westergren there in Sherrill park.

Mr. Matthews: Well Mike, is the judge. He has been the judge for many years. Still a judge and he takes me to places like that all the meeting here.

Mr. Misenhimer: Now do you recall seeing any particular ships being hit by the Kamikazes?

Mr. Matthews: Oh you better believe it. Many of them.

Mr. Misenhimer: What are some other things?

Mr. Matthews: Well I just remember the worst things. It was quite years ago.

Mr. Misenhimer: When did you get discharged?

Mr. Matthews: It must have been in 1946.

Mr. Misenhimer: What did you do when you got out?

Mr. Matthews: I sold life insurance. I was in charge of everyone who sold life insurance and hospitalization from Sanantonio to South<sup>to</sup>Mexico. I have a gold plaque here from National Association Life Underwriters where I was one the 100 best in Corpus and in the whole United States.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you stay in the reserves when you got out.

Mr. Matthews: No, when I got out I wanted out completely.

Mr. Misenhimer: You resigned your commission then.

Mr. Matthews: That's right.

Mr. Misenhimer: How was the morale in your outfit in Okinawa?

Mr. Matthews: Wonderful.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you ever see the sign KilRoy was here?

Mr. Matthews: No sure didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you get home from World War II with any souvenirs?

Mr. Matthews: I had some. I lost them. I don't remember what all they were. I sure don't have them. I don't know if I gave them to my kids.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you ever see any USO shows anywhere?

Mr. Matthews: No I sure didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Matthews: No.

Mr. Misenhimer: When you got out did you have trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. Matthews: None what so ever.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose on the radio?

Mr. Matthews: Oh yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer: What did you think of her?

Mr. Matthews: She was something.

Mr. Misenhimer: What all did she do?

Mr. Matthews: I don't know. I just remember Tokyo Rose.

Mr. Misenhimer: I hear she played good music.

Mr. Matthews: Oh wonderful music.

Mr. Misenhimer: What did you think of the officers you had over you?

Mr. Matthews: Oh they were wonderful, great.

Mr. Misenhimer: Any problems with them at all?

Mr. Matthews: None what so ever. I can't remember their names I only remember their faces.

Mr. Misenhimer: Now April 12, 1945 President Roosevelt died did you all hear about that?

Mr. Matthews: Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer: What reaction did people have?

Mr. Matthews: Oh it was terrible we thought he was a wonderful President.

Mr. Misenhimer: Then May 8, 1945 Germany surrendered did you all hear about that?

Mr. Matthews: Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer: Any kind of celebration?

Mr. Matthews: Yes big celebration.

Mr. Misenhimer: Now August 6<sup>th</sup> they dropped the first atomic bomb did you hear about that?

Mr. Matthews: You better believe it.

Mr. Misenhimer: What reaction did you all have to that?

Mr. Matthews: That was great. Oh man, that showed them we could really protect our country.

Mr. Misenhimer: Then when Japan surrendered did you have a celebration then?

Mr. Matthews: You better believe a great one.

Mr. Misenhimer: Where were you then?

Mr. Matthews: I don't even remember to tell you the truth. That was so many years ago it's hard to remember everything. You remember combat and your wife and your children. It's hard to remember everything that happened otherwise.

Mr. Misenhimer: Now on September 2, 1945 they had a ceremony on the Missouri for the surrender were you anywhere near that?

Mr. Matthews: No I wasn't.

Mr. Misenhimer: You were still on Okinawa I imagine?

Mr. Matthews: No I think I was in China but I'm not sure.

Mr. Misenhimer: I'm not sure could be. What would you consider your worst day during World War II?

Mr. Matthews: The night we landed April 1, 1945. That's the only day I can remember at all.

Mr. Misenhimer: What were some of your close calls?

Mr. Matthews: Well, I had large shots ringing by me. Never did hit me. I don't know if they were machine guns, or rifles, or what they were. You sure did duck down.

Mr. Misenhimer: What metals and ribbons did you get?

Mr. Matthews: I got the Purple Heart, the regular ~~1st~~ and , one shows that I'm a Captain. That's about it.

Mr. Misenhimer: How many battle stars did you get?

Mr. Matthews: I don't remember to tell you the truth Too many things to give to your children.  
You forget which child you gave it to or what happened to them. I thought I would <sup>die</sup> years ago  
and that's why I gave them to them early.

Mr. Misenhimer: You mentioned Guadalcanal? What about Guadalcanal?

Mr. Matthews: I got a Purple Heart on Okinawa.

Mr. Misenhimer: You got that for falling down?

Mr. Matthews: Falling down on Wilson's Ridge.

Mr. Misenhimer: Was Captain the highest rank you got to?

Mr. Matthews: Yes. Of course after the war was over I probably would of gone all the way.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you consider staying in?

Mr. Matthews: No I wanted out.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you use your G.I bill for anything?

Mr. Matthews: Well I think I'm getting a monthly income for being injured on Okinawa.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you use your G.I bill to go to college or anything like that?

Mr. Matthews: No I had already graduated from college.

Mr. Misenhimer: Have you been to any reunions?

Mr. Matthews: Oh I go to all of them they have here at Corpus Christi.



Mr. Misenhimer: How about the first Marine division?

Mr. Matthews: I go to all of them.

Mr. Misenhimer: They have them in different places all the time.

Mr. Matthews: Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer: Do you still keep contact with some people you were in the service with?

Mr. Matthews: No most of them are dead. There is only one I keep in contact with. He was with me when I was in China. His name was Bob. He was an officer in the Marine Corp. He lives in Hallettsville, Texas. I believe.

Mr. Misenhimer: Do you happen to have his phone number?

Mr. Matthews: I have it some place, but I can't find it. He calls about every six months.

Mr. Misenhimer: if you have that I would like to interview him.

Mr. Matthews: Yeah. It would take me a year to find it.

Mr. Misenhimer: Is there anything else you recall from your time in the service?

Mr. Matthews: No just that first night on Okinawa.

Mr. Misenhimer: Well Ken, thank you for your time today and thank you for your service to our country.

Mr. Matthews: Well thank you for calling I sure appreciate it and like I said the only thing is that I love all people and I don't care if they are black, white, purple, or pink, or blue. I try to help all people here. Here in the United States. They are all wonderful people. Have a nice day.

Mr. Misenhimer: Bye now.

Mr. Matthews: Bye.

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