

Harold E. Clay Oral History Interview

MIKE ZAMBRANO: This is Mike Zambrano and today is the 25th of February 2015. I'm interviewing Mr. Harold E. Clay at his home in Highland Estates in Cedar Park, Texas. This interview is in support of the Nimitz Education Research Center archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information related to this site. OK, can you tell me when and when -- I'm sorry, when and where you were born?

HAROLD CLAY: I was born in Flint, Michigan. April 17, 1926.

MZ: What were your parents' names?

HC: I'm Jr. and my mother's name was Margaret.

MZ: Do you have brothers or sisters?

HC: I had two sisters, both older than I am.

MZ: What were their names?

HC: Dorothy and Virginia.

MZ: What did your father do for a living?

HC: He was a salesman. He worked for GE for a long time. I can't tell you the years.

MZ: Oh, that's fine.

HC: But I know during Depression he was a salesman, a pretty good one too.

MZ: Oh, that was my next question. What was it like during the Depression for you and your family?

HC: Well, to me, it was just another ordinary day. I didn't realize, you know, when you were a kid depression, I was [started?] in what 1929? I was only a kid, you know, during that period. We always had food on the table, I know that.

MZ: He must have been a really good salesman then?

HC: Yeah, he was.

MZ: So, did you -- were you in Flint the entire time from when you were born until the time you graduated from high school?

HC: What was the question again?

MZ: Did you -- were you still living in Flint when you graduated?

HC: Oh, no. We left Flint in '29. And we moved back to Massachusetts.

MZ: Oh, OK.

HC: Lynn, Mass.

MZ: Lynn, Mass.?

HC: Yeah.

MZ: Lynn, Mass.

HC: It's about 14 miles north of Boston.

MZ: OK.

HC: On the coast.

MZ: And is that where you were when you graduated from high school?

HC: Yes.

MZ: OK, and that would have been about 19--

HC: Nineteen... oh God.

MZ: Nineteen-forty-four?

HC: No, no, no, no. Let's see, it wasn't the same. I went to St. Mary's all those years, I can't remember. I know I graduated, or I would have graduated in '42, but we all went in the Marine Corps and I was, that was it.

MZ: You -- But the war starts when you're still in high school, though?

HC: Yes, yeah.

MZ: Do you remember hearing about the bombing of Pearl Harbor?

HC: Yeah, that was. I remember, I was living at 55 Whiting St. the second floor and I remember hearing it on the news along with my mother and father. She had been watching five o'clock one, I remember that was a religious program that was on, and it was interrupted to bring the news of the bombing.

MZ: Do you recall how people reacted? Were they anxious? Were they angry?

HC: I beg your pardon?

MZ: Do you recall how people reacted to that?

HC: Well, first when it was "Where's Pearl Harbor?" You know?

MZ: Yeah, you hear that a lot.

HC: I know I had no idea where any of that was. My father, he says, "Oh, no, not again." I remember him saying that. He had been in the first world war, and it was just, like I say, no one knew where this place was, what caused it. In fact, I didn't even know the Japanese, to me, it was just the Orient somewhere. I couldn't distinguish between Japanese, Koreans, Chinese.

MZ: It was just a place, pretty much. OK, well, since the war starts before -- let me ask this instead. Do you see a lot of friends, especially the older ones, going to enlist right away?

HC: There were a few of my kids in the senior class, I think there was eight of them, I'm not sure, don't quote me on it, but eight seems to stick in my mind that volunteered instantly. The rest of us wanted to go in, but not too young.

MZ: Right. Since you're home before, as the war starts, I'm just curious, did, I guess you experienced some rationing and things like that?

HC: Oh, yeah. They had it, but I mean, I didn't really pay that much attention to it. I remember the A stickers for

the gas, there was rationing but I don't remember. My mother handled all of that, you know?

MZ: What did your mother do? Was she just a homemaker or --?

HC: That's all, she was just a homemaker.

MZ: What prompted you to go into the Marine Corps when you could enlist?

HC: My cousin, Ronald Dunn, he enlisted a year before I did. He went in the Marine Corps, and I sort of looked up to him all my life so...

MZ: So you're still living in Lynn, Mass you said?

HC: I was living in Lynn, Mass, yeah.

MZ: So is there like a recruiting office there, do you have to go to Boston?

HC: No, Boston, would 14 miles in to Boston.

MZ: Now, were you quite 18 yet or were you still 17 years old?

HC: I was 17.

MZ: Did you father have to sign for you?

HC: Yeah.

MZ: What did he say about that?

HC: Well, it was, you have to understand, ours was a very popular war. Everyone was behind it, not like what came after, the [other tipper?] war. I mean, they were lining up to get into the service. I went in at 17 and there was a, at the time, if you joined the Army or the Navy or

overseas, 17 the Marine Corps they wanted the young ones, they shipped [the rate oversea?] I took my boot camp at Parris Island, South Carolina, and, you know what I recall most about that? Not the boot camp, but there was a little Yemassee, South Carolina just outside of the base and it was my first encounter with the blacks not being equal to us. When I walked down the street, an 80-year-old woman had to get off the sidewalk 'til I walked by, I mean, it was so unbelievable, you know?

MZ: And, yeah, I guess, pretty strange thing you saw --

HC: You know it's shock. I mean, that was my reaction. I just couldn't believe that something like that would happen in our day and age then.

MZ: Right. Did you witness anything else that was you kind of shocking like that?

HC: No, no, I mean, I just -- these are experiences I observed and that's it. I didn't see any violence of any sort.

MZ: Let me see, can you tell me a little bit about your experience in basic training?

HC: Well, like I say, I went to Paris Island and we were there for six weeks, and we all had no idea of military procedure or anything so that was drilled into us constantly. Another thing, for the first time in my life, I run across okra and hominy and I had never eaten it before and I

didn't like them, but it was compulsory to eat everything on your plate. That's a little sideline, may be interested in there, but the training, a lot of my training was small arms. We used the [03?] then, we didn't have the M1, and we used to have to break that down and put it back together again. We did that constantly.

MZ: Did you spend a lot of time at the rifle range?

HC: I think we were at the rifle range two or three weeks.

We'd completed over half our training at the base, then we went out to the rifle range. I'd never gotten by a rifle in my life. I wasn't very good at it.

MZ: Oh, really?

HC: Yeah.

MZ: What did you -- do you recall -- I've heard that there are different kinds of badges or sharpshooter, marksman, and like expert rifler?

HC: I had the lowest one. I don't -- the lowest one wasn't marksman.

MZ: Did you like firing a rifle?

HC: It was an experience, exhilarating experience, I had never done it before. I remember drill says "Keep your damn eyes open when you pull the trigger."

MZ: What about any hand to hand combat or anything like that?

HC: We went through, how am I going to say it, we went through

the preliminary moves, but we didn't dwell on it. I mean, that was more people who were specialized in that form, they trained heavy on that, but we didn't, the ordinary recruit didn't.

MZ: And there was a lot of military etiquette, right?

HC: Yeah.

MZ: Even wording, like bulkhead and deck and things like that?

HC: The what?

MZ: Was the vocabulary different too? Like --

HC: Yeah, it was a naval, they used naval terms, like you just mentioned bulkhead and so forth, you know, we wouldn't use them, we'd use walls and stuff, but it was a natural procedure, I mean, they didn't push it on us, we just picked up as we went along.

MZ: When you enlisted, did you go alone or did you go with a friend, or?

HC: No, I was alone. That was, I can't remember, I think it was either 17 or 18 of us that enlisted, got on the train from Boston to Parris Island, but they were taken all over, from all over Massachusetts.

MZ: This being your first time away from home, really, were you apprehensive or nervous?

HC: I wouldn't say apprehensive, I would say [embanktuous?]. I was looking forward to what was going -- I had never been



out on a limb before, so, you know, this was a new adventure, and I think most of the kids felt that way.

MZ: Now this is 1943 at this point?

HC: Forty-three. April of '43.

MZ: So you spend about six weeks, you said, at Parris Island?

HC: Five or six weeks, I can't tell you exactly.

MZ: When you left, did you feel that you got a real good, thorough training?

HC: No, I'd been introduced into the Marine Corps, but there was a lot I didn't know about it. They gave us a five-day leave, and then we were shipped for advanced training. I went off to California. A lot of them went to the second division, which was in, where the hell was it, in the Carolinas, I forget where, and I went out to Tent City in California, which was in the San Diego area, just above the San Diego area.

MZ: Was it Pendleton? Camp Pendleton?

HC: Pendleton was there, but we were part of Tent City. Pendleton was loaded, we were the overdraft.

MZ: Tent City, huh?

HC: Yeah.

MZ: So when you get there, what then? What do you do?

HC: Well, we lived in tents and I think there was probably 14, 16, I forget how many in the tent, and we had a staff

sergeant who was over us. He didn't sleep with us in the tent, but he was there every day, kicked your ass up to do this, order the meals, training, a lot of marching, oh my god, you can't believe it, we would march sometimes without any exaggeration, I'm saying nine to ten hours a day.

MZ: Really?

HC: Yeah.

MZ: Would you have like a full pack and --

HC: Sometimes. Sometimes just, but we marched everywhere. We marched to the meals, we marched back to the barracks, we marched back on the freight field, I mean it was just, there were indoctrinating you into the feeling of command, you're going to follow a command and they were quite successful at it.

MZ: When you said advanced training earlier, what kind of advanced training did they teach you there?

HC: Well, over then, we came in at armament, they didn't have -- we dropped the O3s and we picked up the M1 rifle, and they said, "Get used to this. You're gonna live with it, and God help you if you didn't. It's your lifeline." And, then they interest in the bar, in the brownie automatic 1917, by the way, that's when that came out, but it was still used in World War II, in fact a lot. People didn't want to carry it because the Japanese would pick you off if

they seen you with one, they had a tripod on the front, so they'd take off the tripod and just put it over their shoulder like a rifle. I never had to carry one, thank God, I was too light. Usually, it's a 180 pounds, I like I would probably go 125.

MZ: But those things weigh like 20 pounds, don't they?

HC: I don't think they were that high. I think stripped down they were 10 pounds. Nine and a half, 10 pounds, but then you put in ammunition clips and so forth, took good [manner?] to carry one, but the fighter [polerano?] was terrific, I mean.

MZ: What else did you undergo in advanced training?

HC: In advanced, we learned about the Japanese. We had a lot of classes on the Japanese soldier themselves, forget that bullshit they say about the little guys with the big glasses, they show you a Japanese and they say put them in an American uniform you can't tell the difference because, you know, they did look a lot similar to us other than the skin tone, and they said how aggressive he was, they beat that into us, and they lived on the Shinto code, and they explained Shinto code to us and they main -- life meant nothing to them, whereas we were told to fight for ourselves and fight for America, but stay alive, they were told "Die for the emperor if need be." So, they -- we are

constant track on that, you know?

MZ: What did you think about that?

HC: Huh?

MZ: What did you think about that?

HC: Well, it was foreign to me. I couldn't understand how someone could look forward to death.

MZ: It's kind of weird to think about.

HC: Yeah, it's strange, but we went along with it, naturally, because that's what they were telling us. The main thing was always, "Kill Japanese. Kill Japanese." That was beat into your head from the time you entered advanced training. That's what you're there to do.

MZ: Did you get more time on the firing range in advanced training?

HC: Yeah, we were out there. Nothing spectacular, just to go over what you've already learned, but they, we spent a lot of time on the M1 rifle, breaking it down, putting it together, breaking it down, 'cause one of the -- the beat into you, you've got to have a clean rifle or it won't fire, if it don't fire, you're dead. So, we spent a lot of time stripping them down, putting them back together again, and marching.

MZ: So when you're done at Tent City, where do you go to from there?

HC: I was dispatched, the first marine division, fifth regiment, and I joined them, the whole, I can't think where, on some island, I don't remember the name, but it wasn't Pearl or one of the big ones.

MZ: Could it have been like in New Guinea?

HC: No, it wasn't in New Guinea. Where the hell was it?

MZ: It couldn't have been Australia, could it?

HC: No. No, no, I never got to Australia. I can't think of the name of it. It could have been in New Hebrides, I'm not sure.

MZ: I tried to look it up because you did say you were at Peleliu right?

HC: Peleliu, believe it or not, that's probably one of the worst battles of the Pacific War, as far as the Marine Corps goes.

MZ: I was reading about it, it was pretty bad.

HC: Yeah, yeah. They took casualties where, well, the Navy screwed up, for one thing.

MZ: How so?

HC: They had a reef. They brought us in these boats and they couldn't get over the reef, so we had to go about 50 to 100 feet, wade into the beach.

MZ: Was this the thing they called the Point? Somewhere around there?

HC: The Point, I've heard the expression, but I can't remember, you know, I never came directly in touch with it, but I've heard the expression, but I don't know how it was used.

MZ: Can you, I've never interviewed a marine from, that actually goes in and lands on the beach, how does that whole process work, from when you're on the ship and you hear you're ready to load up, how does that all work?

HC: Well, you're on the boat and then you go in waves. The first three waves, you don't want to be in them. The first two are probably 50% wiped out. The third does a little better, but it's not until the fourth, fifth, and sixth that you know, but the first waves are always, they decimated marines like they were going out of style. They ran out of the heavy gunfire.

MZ: What wave were you in?

HC: I think I was in the sixth or seventh, I'm not sure. You know, we had many, it's hard to say because every transport was leaving, you know, dropping Higgins boats and so forth, which we went in on, and they went in different periods, so I don't know, I know I wasn't one of the first.

MZ: And so, you get into a was it Higgins boat or was it one of those LVTs with those straps?

HC: No, no, no, no, no. It had a front ramp and held probably about 22, 24 and a coxswain. There was the Higgins boats

and then there was LCVTs actually, LSTs for the tanks, and so forth, which we went in on, and they went in different periods, so I don't know, I know I wasn't one of the first.

MZ: And so, you get into a was it Higgins boat or was it one of those LVTs with those straps?

HC: No, no, no, no, no. It had a front ramp and held probably about 22, 24 and a coxswain. There was the Higgins boats and then there was LCVTs actually, LSTs for the tanks, and so forth. I'm not up on a lot of the Navy terms.

MZ: So this really your first time in combat?

HC: Oh, yeah, yeah. Scared to death. We all were. And [the ones who say they weren't are crazy?]

MZ: That was my next question, you -- so you're coming in toward the shore, I imagine, do you remember how loud it is, or are you just so --

HC: The noise was unbelievable, you've got Navy gunfire bombarding the island. You've got Japanese flack coming back, shooting out at us, and trying to hit the naval ships. It's just -- if you never experienced it, there's no trying to explain it, it was just unbelievable, and like I said, you were scared to death, anyone who says he wasn't is crazy, 'cause it was a new experience and one you didn't look forward to, but when the -- you felt compelled to do. You wouldn't want to look bad against the other marines you

knew who

MZ: Were standing right there next to you?

HC: Yeah. I remember reading, or watching on television, an army group called the band of brothers, we were a band of brothers much longer, before they came down with that term.

MZ: Had you seen the miniseries The Pacific?

HC: I've seen some, but I don't know. I really don't want to watch it.

MZ: I can understand.

HC: Yeah, I got enough bad memories to live without going back over with them.

MZ: I've seen both of those, I found the Pacific really hard to watch, it was very different, let's say that. OK, so you're coming in, into the beach and the ramp drops, it might seem like a really obvious question, but what do you do?

HC: Well, you gotta get safe and the only place to do is to get on the beach. There is no safety in the water, so you work towards the beach. A lot of kids never made it. A lot of them died in the water. I was lucky enough to, like I said, I was in one of the later waves, but I know the first, second waves all those kids probably 40, 50 percent of them were in the water I had to go through to get to the beach.



MZ: At that point, I imagine, you must be very focused on where you're going to not really think about it at the time?

HC: Yeah, well the main thing is to get to the beach. There's security there. Then when we get to the beach, we usually had a sergeant who says here you, you, and you get over here, this one try to form some sort of cohesiveness that we could move on.

MZ: Who was your sergeant? Do you remember?

HC: Wilber, Wilber H. Bailey, his name was. He was a career marine.

MZ: And was he that sergeant that was organizing all of you on the beach?

HC: Oh, yeah, yeah. And we had a first lieutenant, I can't remember, we had so many and they died like flies. I think the life expectancy of a second or first lieutenant was somewhere a round four minutes, you know. Because they had to lead the offense and they were the first ones to get shot down.

MZ: I imagine there was a lot of inexperience with lieutenants also.

HC: Yeah, yeah. Well they tried to promote a lot from the ranks, and you'd be surprised, no one wanted, they didn't want a commission. Not on this operation, I'm talking later on in the war. You know, they'd say "Hey, the second

lieutenant job is up" no one would, you know, no part of that.

MZ: So, you get onto the island and let's see, what did I write here? I did read that the unit took a lot of casualties?

HC: I beg your pardon?

MZ: I did read that the unit took a lot of casualties.

HC: Yeah, like I said, the first and second wave, probably 40 50% were killed or wounded, mostly killed, you could almost walk on the bodies, I mean, it was that many of them.

Peleliu, I don't know how Marine Corps classifies it, but I'd say it's right up there with [e?] wars the top five wars, but I know it's right up there with the other one.

MZ: Somebody had put it at the top of the list, I think. Bloodiest for the first division, it said.

HC: We were supposed to take Peleliu in four days, we were there two months.

MZ: Yeah, I read the quote, it would be a tough fight, but short. I guess some general?

HC: Yeah, in and out no problem.

MZ: Yes. Kind of a miscalculation there. I heard that the marine objective was to get to the airstrip.

HC: Yeah, there were two airstrips on the island. One was comparatively easy because it was on the coast, the other one was inland, that was a harder one. But, I never fought

the Germans, I have no idea, but I can't find out how they could have been any better than the Japanese soldier. He was a marvel, believe me. His, a man, you could give him a [bicepro?] 300 pounds on him, and handlebars, and give him a handful of beans and he's good for 300 miles, you know. Fighters were the most determined fighters you ever want to see. A total disregard for life. It's hard to fight with someone like that.

MZ: Yeah, not only are they tough, but they put some fear in you too, thinking that they don't care about their life, and you might care about yours.

HC: But the thing with them when they lost, they knew they were lost, they formed together and had a banshee attack. We'd see it coming and set up two 30 caliber or a 50 caliber machine and pick 'em off at a crossfire, but that's the way of life. It was better to die for the emperor than to surrender.

MZ: Did you ever see any of the prisoners around here?

HC: I seen it, but never on, I seen them later on.

MZ: So two months on Peleliu what else do you recall about being on the island and the fighting?

HC: I'm a little deaf so.

MZ: What else do you remember about being on Peleliu?

HC: The smell.

MZ: The smell?

HC: Yeah, I still have it in my nostrils to this day. I'll wake up in the middle of the night. I can smell, it was a combination of blood, water, and gunshot --

MZ: Gun powder?

HC: Gun sight gun powder, whatever the hell they called it. It was, you know, it was terrible, it's hard to imagine it, but it clung to everything, it clung to your food. I think more people resented that than anything else.

MZ: The battle you mean or the smell?

HC: The smell. The battle was predictable, we knew we were going to take them, it was just a question of time. And what kicked in our favor was the flame thrower. That was the greatest weapon the Marine Corps had.

MZ: How would they use it?

HC: Very few, no one wanted to carry it because you had two tanks on your back, and it was hard to carry it, the Japanese would try to and go to put a bullet through it, if it did, you blew up. But a lot of guys carried it. I wasn't the adventurous type, I was too light anyway. You had to be, like I said, 160-170 pounds for that.

MZ: How much did you weigh at this point?

HC: About 145.

MZ: OK, which I guess you did see them used, though, the flame

throwers?

HC: Yeah, oh yeah.

MZ: What would they use them on?

HC: Pill boxes. Caves. Mainly caves. And a lot of times you'll have a stretch where you can't see the enemy, but you know he's there, but he doesn't pop up so you can get a shot at him, so what they'll do is take a flame thrower, shoot it up in the air, and drop it down on them.

MZ: Oh, because there's some kind of gelatin that's being shot out so up in the air and down.

HC: Yeah, right.

MZ: Oh, well --

HC: The flame thrower was the greatest weapon we had in World War II, as far as the Pacific goes.

MZ: Well, it was effective against someone, like you said, that had a disregard for life.

HC: Yeah.

MZ: I ran across across a [thing?] of the commander of the fifth regiment Colonel Harold Harris, Colonel Harold Harris, does that name ring a bell?

HC: Vaguely, but I can't, you know, PFCs didn't associate with major generals in the Marine Corps.

MZ: Oh, no, I know, but I would think that maybe, he was your regimental commander?

HC: Well, the thing was, my main thing was my sergeant and first lieutenant. That was my whole existence. We didn't worry about anything about that. That -- we heard about them afterwards, but...

MZ: Do you remember what company you were in?

HC: C company, third battalion.

MZ: C company, third battalion. Tell me about some of the other marines that you fought with.

HC: You mean, personalities?

MZ: Friends that you made, personalities, anything.

HC: Well, I had one friend, one good friend. Come from upstate New York. Clyde Amerol, his name was. We shared food together, we shared bunk holes, you know, stuff like that. He was good kid. He was killed later on, not in that part of it. He was killed at Tinian. You know, there's so many islands that the Marine Corps hit, I'm taking one two, I'm talking 50-60 islands marine went, that you never heard the name of, and I don't know the names of, but marines died on every damn one of them.

MZ: That's true.

HC: You heard about the big islands, but you never heard about the little ones.

MZ: Yeah, so that -- so I started really researching this a number of years ago, I never heard places like [Yap?]

HC: Oh, yeah.

MZ: I knew about Tinian, but Kwajalein What's the other one?

HC: Well, you went from Saipan, which we up the line to Tinian to Guam, those were the three in that row. We were at Saipan, one of the marines, like I said, one of my buddies, he went to Tinian, he got himself killed there, and I didn't get under Guam, but I served with a lot of guys who did, beautiful city, they said. Beautiful.

MZ: What else do you recall of Peleliu? You know, actually, let me ask you this. I was reading that after they took the airstrip, there was an Island, I guess to the north, that the fifth regiment was asked to go and capture, do you remember anything about that?

HC: Ie Shima?

MZ: Well, it's got a really weird name Ngesebus?

HC: No, I don't know, no.

MZ: I'm probably not even pronouncing it right, but I've just never seen it before, yeah, it says sent to secure Ngesebus Island.

HC: I have no idea. We didn't inquire to much about -- we were only interested in what we were doing ourselves, so it's...

MZ: I'm curious, because you say you were there for two months, what were the nights like?

HC: Scared to death half the time. You never knew when they

were coming. They were known to have night patrols, and they got to remember where there were a lot of trenches with the marines and killed them, so you didn't sleep. All the time I was on the island, I had cat naps and most of those were in the daytime, because you got to stay wide awake at night, you never knew what was coming. And they used to holler at you.

MZ: In Japanese or in English?

HC: In English. English, you know, calling you names, saying "We're coming," I can't remember, but...

MZ: What did you -- how did you eat?

HC: How did we--? Well, we had a lot of C Rations and they did get meals up to us. Not at first, but afterwards they set up some simple chow lines. You, you may eat it along with bugs and everything, but you ate it because it was good. Coffee was the main thing. I hate black coffee, but I drank it then.

MZ: You mentioned rain, did it rain a lot?

HC: Yeah, yeah, torrential rains, and the footing was terrible, you know?

MZ: Did -- I assume that you weren't always on the front line, were you?

HC: No, no, no, no, no. No one was actually on the front lines, we [tend toes?] you know, would probably be up there



seven, eight days at the top, then pull you back and send somebody else up there. You couldn't stay there for any length of time, you know. The human body just wouldn't be able to handle it.

MZ: I see what you mean, but so when you were pulled back, did you sleep and live in tents like the ones you mentioned earlier?

HC: Yeah, we had tents. We'd go swimming in the ocean. We did a lot of things, trying to bring back a memory of what we had before we were in this -- it's hard to explain, but -- and we wrote a lot of letters.

MZ: Did you yourself write a lot back home?

HC: Yeah, I wrote, I wrote home an average of three times a week. You know, it was available to write, a lot of times it wasn't. I didn't have a girlfriend, unfortunately, but I used to write my mother and my sister.

MZ: Would they send you care packages?

HC: No, no, we never could get packages. We moved too fast to, and they never knew where we were. They wanted to send a package, they'd have to send it 8 PO Pacific, which would be anywhere.

MZ: That's pretty big. What else would you do in your free time?

HC: Well, I said we swam, we marched, believe it or not, we

marched. We never got -- damn marching was a part of the Marine Corps, I mean, they'd find a way to have you march and we'd strip our rifles down, and now we did it, not because they asked us to, but because we wanted to. The M1 was your lifeblood. Without it, you were nothing. And we had card games, I never participated, I was never a card player, but a lot of gambling. And a lot of, we'd sit around and just discuss home with different people, not necessarily your home, their home, you know, but it was, like I said, we were a true band of brothers, much more than the army.

MZ: Well, you just have each other out there, really.

HC: Yeah, you relied on him, and he knew that. And you knew it. If you found yourself in a position where it's dangerous, you'd say to yourself, "But they're out there, I gotta help." And you went. That seems sort of strange to say, but it was a truth, and it was felt by everyone out there. The morale was wonderful. I never remember seeing us down, we were always, had a spirit that we were going to win and that's the whole thing to it.

MZ: You know, there is one thing that I read about the division. Did you ever sing "Waltz and Matilda"?

HC: No, no. That was strictly Australian.

MZ: I only ask because I read somewhere that while the division

is in Australia before you join it, they pick it up as kind of a division song, so I just thought I'd ask.

HC: No, I never heard, I've heard it since, but I never heard it in that, at that time period.

MZ: Is there anything else about Peleliu that you'd like to share before we move on to the next step?

HC: No, like I already mentioned, I think it was the bloodiest battle of the Pacific.

MZ: It was.

HC: I don't know how that goes down in history.

MZ: You know, it's funny, Iwo Jima, I guess even Leyte Gulf get a lot of, a lot of play. If you go to a bookstore, you'll see different books on those, but I've only seen a handful of books on Peleliu, but I think that is the bloodiest fight for the first [marine?] division, or what did I have here,

HC: You can't cut out though, a couple that stick in my mind, I'm just trying to put them in perspective.

MZ: Battles?

HC: It's not coming, I'm not --

MZ: Are you trying to recall battles?

HC: Yeah.

MZ: Sainam? Guam?

HC: No, the real bad one was after, towards the end of the war.

MZ: Okinawa?

HC: It was on Okinawa, and it was a hill on Okinawa, but we took Okinawa. It was the 29th Regiment that we had been broken up, I had been dispatched in September or October of 1944, and we were sent to Guadalcanal, and there were formed the 29th, Sixth marine, we formed the Sixth marine division, 29th regiment. We were going to be the spearhead in November on assaulting Japan proper, and we went through, the training was unbelievable.

MZ: At Guadalcanal?

HC: Yeah.

MZ: What made it so tough?

HC: It was all together different from anything we had experienced before.

MZ: How so?

HC: We were taught to fight the Japanese soldier elsewhere, but on Okinawa, no. If you see a girl coming, kill her. If you see a boy coming, kill him. A little boy coming with a stick, kill him. They emphasized anything that moved in Japanese, kill them, because they were going to kill you, and that beat that into you, and it was hard for the average guy to say "Hey, how do you shoot a young kid?" But they drilled it into you. They said "Believe me, if you don't, he's going to kill you."

MZ: That's a tough decision to make.

HC: Yeah.

MZ: A lot of the sixth marines, they're already veterans, though, right [like 65 percent?]

HC: Oh, yeah, yeah. Don't confuse the sixth marines and the sixth marine division.

MZ: Oh, I'm sorry, sixth marine division. Sixth marines would mean, what? Sixth marine regiment?

HC: Sixth marines would be second, third division, wouldn't it? I'm not sure --

MZ: Thank you for pointing that out.

HC: Yeah, the 29th division was the sixth marine division, and they had a [a shot's face?] that we were in it [wake up battle?] We, oh God, I can't even remember the names of them now.

MZ: Well, let me ask you this, let me ask you this. Back to Guadalcanal and the intensive training you had, again, what else made it so intensive to you, because it seems like it really put pressure on you.

HC: The idea of killing children was heavy on our minds. The thought of going into Japan proper. They were telling us we were going to be one of the first divisions to enter Japan, and they were saying overall, not just your outfit, but any others that follow you in, we would lose a half a

million men. That's what the life expectancy, that they expected to lose on taking that out.

MZ: When you leave Guadalcanal, would you find out that your division is going to Okinawa?

HC: We found out, well, like I said, we were trained to go in in November, they said "Let's get their feet wet, we'll send them in in April to Okinawa." Now, we hit Okinawa, everyone figured this is, we're it, it's going to be tough. We had an easy landing, we had no problem at all.

MZ: I'm surprised by that.

HC: Yeah, my outfit, we went north, and we cleaned out -- now we took quite a -- I'll say, where we landed on Okinawa was in the lower half. We swept, we went right and went north and cleaned out all of the island. There wasn't -- three weeks, and it was all done. And it was just, nothing spectacular, and then we came back and we run into hell. The Japanese has bombed a line across Okinawa and it ran from Yaha -- Yaha, which was the capital in the e -- in the west to Shuri Castle in the right, about eight miles, and that's where they dug in, and they were well dug in. Awful lot of men died on that stretch, because what the Japs would do, you'd finally overpower them, but all they'd do is just move back and start all over again.

MZ: Was that because they had like a tunnel system?

HC: They had tunnels, yes. They had hospitals. I've never seen them, but I heard they had hospitals underground, but Okinawa has to go down as one of the toughest battles of the Pacific, especially what I said around Shuri Castle. That's where, what was the name of the, this one section above Shuri Castle where the marines, we hit eight or nine times with heavy losses, and that was the gateway to Shuri Castle. You had to take, what the hell was the name of it, do you mind, my memory's gone.

MZ: No, you're doing fine. Don't worry.

HC: I can't remember the name of it, anyways, it was heavily fortified Japanese post that controlled the Shuri line and we hit it eight or nine times, we took it on the 10th time only because Geiger sent in Geiger was the army general in charge Lieutenant General Geiger, he sent in his tanks on a roundabout cut and then we charged it, what the hell was the other one, I don't remember, there was another outfit in there. Geiger was a good general as far as the army goes. He was fair with the marines, you know. He was killed in Guadalcanal.

MZ: He was?

HC: Yeah, yeah. Simon Bolivar Buckner was buried there, I remember

MZ: Buckner. OK, yeah, yeah, I remember the name. It's kind

of tough thing to forget. Not kind of a tough name to forget.

HC: Yeah, his grandfather was a general in the Confederate army.

MZ: That kind of makes for interesting talk at the Thanksgiving table. What company are you with when you're with the sixth company marine division?

HC: What?

MZ: What company are you with when you're with the sixth marine?

HC: Oh, boy. I know I was in the third battalion. I don't remember. I know I was in the third and we had the best outfit on the siege. At the Shuri Castle they sent in the second and we were held back to cover home base, we covered the left flank of home base, and they were total casualty. The 29th was wiped out after that battle. They no longer functioned as a military unit. I don't know what the death toll was, but I know it was enormous.

MZ: Do you recall a place called Sugarloaf Hill?

HC: Who?

MZ: Sugarloaf Hill.

HC: Yeah. That was part of it. Sugarloaf Hill was what a lot of them died on, trying to take it. I think I told you they went up nine times, it wasn't until the 10th time,



only because Geiger brought his tanks in.

MZ: What is the terrain like that you're fighting on at this point?

HC: What?

MZ: What's the terrain like?

HC: They were again, muddy, a lot of rain, lot of rain, monsoon rain. You'd be up to your knees in it. Tanks bogged down. Cars bogged down. Trucks bogged down. But it happened to the Japanese as well as us. It was sort of a --

MZ: What about hills? Hills? Mountains? Rivers? Plains?

HC: Yeah. There was a lot of hills. A lot of hills. Yeah. And there were a lot of caves, an awful lot of caves. It took a special marine to go into one of them. I wasn't one of the types. I always drew back when they asked for volunteers, because you were going into a cave and you may be traveling 50 yards in that cave not knowing what's in front of you or the sides of you, 'cause they branched off -- and like I said, they had dining rooms and everything else. They were great cave builders.

MZ: They were pretty intricate from what I understand.

HC: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

MZ: Is Okinawa where you first see Japanese prisoners?

HC: Yeah, yeah, yeah. First time I seen them surrender.

Towards the end, they gave up by the thousands. They never

did that before.

MZ: And what did you think about it? I mean, you see a lot of Japanese soldier, what do you think?

HC: Relief. We knew we got the better part of them, and they knew it too. But that still didn't stop these Banshee attacks, I mean, it was nothing for a thousand to come charging at you knowing they were going to die, but that's --

MZ: I imagine it must have been terrifying to have these --

HC: Well, keep in mind they were surrendering by the thousands on Okinawa. On Peleliu, there were 40,000 of them, you know how many prisoners we took? Four.

MZ: Yeah, I can believe that. What --

HC: And another thing in my mind, our attitudes started to change at Okinawa. Like I told you before, we were taught in the Marine Corps, "Kill Japanese. Kill Japanese." But slowly but surely we started to realize they're just young guys like yourself fighting for their country. Sounds hard to believe now, but [unrelated conversation]

MZ: We were still on Okinawa and about Japanese prisoners and the, what your thoughts were about them.

HC: Well like I said, I said it, we looked at them as human beings, you know, kids fighting for their country as well as we were, that didn't stop any animosities, but it gave

us a little clearer thinking on the Japanese soldier. And he changed considerably from Peleliu to Okinawa. It never surrendered on Peleliu. They surrendered by the thousands.

MZ: That's a big difference. Do you think they did that because -- well, why do you think they did that?

HC: I think they were probably sick of the war like we were. They hadn't won a battle. You must be aware, they're losing on all fronts. What's the sense of going on? That's my general thinking on it. And I think they just felt, hey, I'd like to go home and raise a family.

MZ: So, when you leave Okinawa --

HC: I was on Okinawa when they dropped the atomic bomb, and that was it. I was bound to go into Japan proper, but our ship was sidelined and we went to inner China up the Yangtze River to relieve a British war camp -- prisoner of war camp that would take -- up in Manchuria, and that was, and those kids had been up there since Singapore. They were in tough shape.

MZ: Did you say Mucktown?

HC: Moncton. It's right up the head of the Yangtze.

MZ: So you go on to relieve these British prisoners of war?

HC: Yeah.

MZ: How many were there?

HC: I'd say probably 300.

MZ: And where were the Japanese at this point?

HC: They were in no better condition than in the prison. Food was scarce. I guess they were both

MZ: And how did you transport them back down the river? I assume, boat?

HC: We had transports that came up and got them, I think. I'm not sure, my job was to relieve them, after that, I came back down, and then I was homeward bound, and I hit the States in February of '46.

MZ: And you said you got out of the service as a PFC?

HC: Huh?

MZ: You got out of the service as a PFC?

HC: Right, yeah. They didn't hand out too many ranks.

MZ: Do you remember what you were doing when you heard the atomic bomb had been dropped?

HC: I beg your pardon?

MZ: Do you remember what you were doing when you heard that the atomic bomb had been dropped?

HC: What was I doing? I can't remember. I know the first reaction was "What the hell is an atomic bomb?" We had never even heard of it, you know.

MZ: Yeah, something totally different.

HC: Yeah, and then they mentioned they were dropped on Hiroshima and what was it? Hiroshima and --

MZ: Nagasaki.

HC: Yeah, and that the war was over.

MZ: Do you remember where you were when you heard the war was over?

HC: Yeah, I was -- I think I was still in Moncton. I'm not sure, I can't --

MZ: That's all right. So, let me ask you, you go up the Yangtze, you go up to Moncton, again, a little different kind of world from what you're used to, you know. What do you think? What are you thinking?

HC: Well, my first introduction to the Chinese people because we'd stop along the way, and they're very congenial, couldn't do enough for you, very family orientated. You notice that right away. They train respect for their elders. They didn't have a hell of a lot, that's about all I can think about them. I know, I know we thought that when we landed we'd get a piece of ass, you know, but they're very strict on that. They had -- prostitution was, as far as I was concerned, negative. I didn't see it in China at all.

MZ: Interesting.

HC: You've got me worn out now, you know that?

MZ: I'm sorry, we're almost done. So you get back to the States in '46 and you get discharged?

HC: Yeah, I -- marker 46 and the idea then was to send you to the nearest base for discharge, so they sent me to the naval prison at Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

MZ: The naval prison?

HC: Yeah, I was there about two weeks. I remember one of the indoctrination things you got to go through, you got to climb up this big ladder, extended ladder, I hated going up those because, what you do, you'd have a water gun and you could shoot down through windows in case there was a riot or something like that. I hated those things.

MZ: It sounds a little bit scary. It's just an extended ladder like on a --?

HC: Oh, it sways, you know. I bet my handprints are still on the rungs of that ladder.

MZ: So, I guess you didn't think about staying in the service?

HC: No, no, no. I wanted out as soon as possible, and I think that was the general idea most of them.

MZ: Yeah.

HC: I can't remember anyone who stayed in. Of course, the [salts?] that were in the Marine Corps prior, they stayed on.

MZ: So what did you do when you got out? Went to school?

HC: Didn't do anything at first. Then I lazed around. I got sick of that and the GI bill was available, so I thought

I'd take advantage of it.

MZ: So what did you go to school for?

HC: Boston University. I took an engineering course there.

MZ: What year did you graduate?

HC: Nineteen-forty-nine, '50.

MZ: Boston University. Great school.

HC: And then I was offered a job by General Electric and I said no, I wanted to get away from this environment all together, I wanted to go back to the west coast. I love the west coast, so I went there and I [owned?] a small company that produced, I can't even get the word I'm looking for, they produced plastics for, it's gone, just gone.

MZ: Parts for cars?

HC: No, they produced parts for -- they closed, the jet engines, tail sections. Well, I was an industrial engineer, so I went there and I tried my hand at different things and I had an opportunity. They were introducing a thing called SPC, ever heard of this?

MZ: I don't think so.

HC: Statistical Process Control. What it does, you teach the operator to do a certain thing and he becomes much more proficient at the job, so that was my job, and I stayed there until I retired.

MZ: What year did you retire?

HC: God, I don't remember the year now. I -- 1990.

MZ: Nineteen-ninety? That doesn't seem so long ago.

HC: No.

MZ: Well, is there anything that I haven't asked you about your experience during the war that maybe you'd like to share?

HC: I'm glad it's over. Yeah, I'm sure a lot of people think that. I can't think of anything.

MZ: Did you make any good friends that you kept after the war?

HC: No. I did, but I've fallen out with, over the years, they've either died or go another way.

MZ: The event in Cedar Park, did you go to it on December 7?

HC: No, I didn't. I was offered the opportunity to, but I don't think I was feeling too well that, I have my good weeks, I have my bad weeks.

MZ: It looks like you're having a good week this week.

HC: Yeah, it's been not too bad, but it's like everything else. I don't live anymore. I'm existing. This is my world, right here. I mean, I'm not going to go out and get laid, I'm not going to get a job, I'm not, you know. And I've made my mind up to it, yeah, this is it. Sweat it out. That's it. If I died tomorrow it wouldn't faze me in the least.

MZ: That's an interesting way of putting it, but you know, I get your story, so that will always be there. Well, I'm



sorry, let me ask you this. You did get married, right?

HC: Oh, yeah. I married 1947.

MZ: What was her name?

HC: Patricia. Patricia Henning Clay, and she died 11 years ago.

MZ: I'm sorry.

HC: I never got to see Europe. I intended to do it and we planned after I retired to go to Europe, but then she came down with breast cancer and we sweated that out and she recovered from it, but it came back and killed her. We never did quite --

MZ: Beat it?

HC: Yeah.

MZ: Did you have children?

HC: Yeah, I've got, let me count. I've got five living and one died in the service.

MZ: I'm sorry.

HC: He was born in 1950 and he wanted to join the Marine Corps, I said no go in the Navy. It's a better life, 'cause I had seen, you know, when I had my shoes off I'd change my socks in a week, these swabbies eating ice cream off on the deck you know. So I talked him into going in the Navy, and he did, and he went, got himself killed in the Mekong Delta. He was what they called a river rat.

MZ: On one of the patrol boats?

HC: Not a patrol boat, a raft. A mechanized raft. From what I understand, he was strafed by a Russian MiG.

MZ: I'm sorry. What was his name?

HC: Ronald.

MZ: Ronald Clay. What about your other children? What are their names?

HC: Well, I got Bruce, that's who I just talked to now. I have Wayne in Spokane. I've got Jim, he's in California. And I've got, I can't even think of my daughter's name, she lives here in [Linden?]. Christine.

MZ: So is it just the one daughter that lives close by?

HC: Yeah.

MZ: Now is there anything else that you can think of that you'd like to add?

HC: Not really. No, no.

END OF AUDIO FILE