

*National Museum of the Pacific War*

*Nimitz Education and Research Center*

*Fredericksburg, Texas*

Interview with

**Mr. Roy H. Elrod**

Date of Interview: May 16, 2015

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**Interviewer: Charles Simmons**

Mr. Simmons: This is Charlie Simmons. Today is May 16, 2015, and I'm interviewing Colonel Roy H. Elrod. This interview is taking place in Fredericksburg, Texas. It's in the 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. Colonel Elrod, if you would, please give us your name, your date of birth and your place of birth.

Mr. Elrod: My name is Roy Holland Elrod, and I was born June 23, 1919, in Muleshoe, Texas.

Mr. Simmons: Okay, and what sort of family were you born into? What did your parents do?

Mr. Elrod: My father was also Roy Holland Elrod.

Mr. Simmons: Okay. And your mother's name?

Mr. Elrod: Nine Freddie Wallace.

Mr. Simmons: And what did your parents do for a living?

Mr. Elrod: My father was a combination of farmer and (unclear).

Mr. Simmons: Did you live on a farm or in town?

Mr. Elrod: In a farm. I was born on a farm four miles north and one mile west of Muleshoe.

Mr. Simmons: Okay. And did you go to school then in the town?

Mr. Elrod: No, I went to a school in Muleshoe.

Mr. Simmons: Talk a little bit about it. What kind of school was it that you went to?

Mr. Elrod: It was the Muleshoe Elementary School. Grades one through seven were in a two-story brick building in the town of Muleshoe.

Mr. Simmons: You went all the way through seven grades?

Mr. Elrod: Yeah, and then I went to high school at a newer building on the same city block.

Mr. Simmons: When you were growing up, did you work a lot on the farm?

Mr. Elrod: I worked a little bit on the farm just before my twelfth birthday. I went to work for a farmer ten hours a day, six days a week, seventy-five cents a day. But I didn't work there very long and I despised it. I never would be a farmer.

Mr. Simmons: Was this during the summertime or--?

Mr. Elrod: No, this was in the summer, yeah.

Mr. Simmons: Okay. So you went and finished out of high school in the regular order; it took you twelve years to get through?

Mr. Elrod: I might mention that my father died when I was four years old.

Mr. Simmons: Okay. How did the family make a living after that, then?

Mr. Elrod: My mother, when my father knew he was dying, at that time Texas law said a wife could only inherit one-half the property. The other half went to the children; if no children, to the husband's family. So my father's name was never on the 240 acres that was bought; it was bought in my mother's name. And that's where I grew up.

Mr. Simmons: Did she do the farming after that?

Mr. Elrod: She sharecropped, and my father had taken out an insurance policy that gave her \$10,000 when he died and then fifty dollars a month for twenty years.

Mr. Simmons: That was an amazing amount of money for that time.

Mr. Elrod: Yes. Obviously my father was a pretty bright fellow. Unfortunately I have only the faintest memory of one or two things with him.

Mr. Simmons: That's too bad. So you were only, you said four, how old were you when he died?

Mr. Elrod: I was four.

Mr. Simmons: You were four; so that's--well, it's amazing that he provided so well for your family. So when you got into the depression, let's see, you were going into your teen years.

Mr. Elrod: Yes. I was a child of the depression. But see, my mother had, on the sharecropper arrangements, she had forty percent of whatever the farm produced, and then we had the fifty dollars,

and then we butchered a calf every year or a pig. We had chickens. We lived pretty well during the depression. As a matter of fact, it didn't seem to affect me all that much. When I was 12 years old, my maternal grandfather had an ice business and he needed someone to drive the ice delivery truck, so I started delivering ice to houses and business people, and I did that in the summers until he died. I was 15 when he died, so I did that four years.

Mr. Simmons: Was there an ice plant in Muleshoe?

Mr. Elrod: No, the ice plant was up at Farwell Texaco, and the ice was hauled down in 330-pound blocks by truck and stored in an insulated ice house there.

Mr. Simmons: Ice was pretty unusual in this part of the world back in those days. It's interesting. Okay, so when you finished up with high school, did you enjoy school?

Mr. Elrod: I was a pretty good student. I was the, I think the number third in my class. There were two girls that finished ahead of me.

Mr. Simmons: So, what was your ambition then, going to--you said you didn't like the farm work.

Mr. Elrod: Well, for some reason I had decided I wanted to go to Texas A&M. So I started there in the fall of 1936, when I was 17 years old.

Mr. Simmons: Okay, so you graduated at 17 and started at A&M.

Mr. Elrod: Well, I was actually 16 when I graduated but I had my 17<sup>th</sup> birthday before school started in September.

Mr. Simmons: Okay. What did you major in?

Mr. Elrod: Geology.

Mr. Simmons: Did you have any particular reason for that? Was that because of the oil, oil discoveries in Texas?

Mr. Elrod: It was a very strange thing. There had been a book written by Roy Chapman Andrews about his adventures in the Gobi Desert, and that's where he found the first dinosaur eggs and so forth, and it had mentioned that he was a geologist, but it turns out that really wasn't what I was interested in. I was interested in the other adventures. My first year, I was a lousy student. I should never have been there at that time. I was an extremely poor student. If I liked the professor, I made a good grade; if I didn't I made a bad grade.

Mr. Simmons: Well was that your first time away from Muleshoe? Had you done any traveling away from home?

Mr. Elrod: Well, I had visited--at the time I was growing up, my maternal grandparents lived in Rocky Ford, Colorado. I'd been there and I had traveled all over New Mexico, but I hadn't done any specific traveling. This was the first time I had been out on my own.

Mr. Simmons: So, you'd been a few hundred miles from home, but not anything--okay, so what was college life in 1936?

Mr. Elrod: Well, at that time, Texas A&M was a mandatory Army ROTC.

Mr. Simmons: Of course, yeah.

Mr. Elrod: And we lived in military units and so on. I enjoyed that part of it. I liked the military.

Mr. Simmons: How did you do, then, on the military part of it? In your ROTC?

Mr. Elrod: I did fine there. I made some good grades, but some bad grades. It's just because I was a hard-headed kid and if I didn't like somebody I wouldn't perform for them.

Mr. Simmons: Okay. Did you continue on to--?

Mr. Elrod: I worked. I started to work in the summer, the summer before I went off to college. They had a hailstorm in Muleshoe and damaged all those cedar roofs, and my stepfather had called me and told me that this contractor was hiring extra help and I went down and worked for him. I discovered I enjoyed construction, and I worked hard and at the end of the time he needed the extra help, he kept me on. So I was working for twenty-five cents an hour and there would be grown men come by and say, "How much are you paying the kid?" He would tell them, "Twenty-five cents," and they said they would work for fifteen. So I worked hard. I liked that job but I worked to keep it. And I discovered I had a natural talent for construction.

Mr. Simmons: Oh, okay.

Mr. Elrod: So I worked all that summer and then in the summer between my first year at A&M and the second, I worked because I had to earn money in order to stay in school.

Mr. Simmons: Did you go back and work for the same outfit?

Mr. Elrod: The same contractor.

Mr. Simmons: The same contractor? What kind of construction work were you doing then, just roofs?

Mr. Elrod: All type of building, commercial and residential.

Mr. Simmons: Framing and --?

Mr. Elrod: At that time the same crews did virtually everything. Now, we had other people that did the electrical and the plumbing, but the other things we did ourselves, so I learned all aspects of construction.

Mr. Simmons: The foundation and all the way up. Okay. So then at the end of the summer you went back?

Mr. Elrod: I went back, and I was a better student the second year. I had matured some and I did reasonably well the second year. At the end of that year, I had decided that if I was going to be a decent student, I needed to save enough money so that I wouldn't have to work during the school year. So I decided to stay out for a year or two and save my money, and I worked for the contractor that entire period of time.



Mr. Simmons: What, a year and a half or two years?

Mr. Elrod: It was almost two years.

Mr. Simmons: Okay. This is after you had finished two years.

Mr. Elrod: After I had finished two years of college. In the summer of 1940, I had saved enough money to do what I wanted to do. I had been working hard for that period of time, so I wanted to take a little time off before school started. So I went to Lubbock and took a summer course at Tech and it was during that period of time that I made up my mind that we were going to get into World War II, and I knew with my two years of ROTC, and I was 21, I knew that I'd be going into the military sooner or later. They hadn't passed the draft but they were talking about it.

Mr. Simmons: This was the summer of '40.

Mr. Elrod: Summer of '40.

Mr. Simmons: Okay.

Mr. Elrod: And so I decided during that time that I was going to the summer school at Tech that I was not going back to school; I was going in the military. And I was driving through Amarillo and I saw this sign on the sidewalk, Marine Corps Recruiting. I went in--I had only the vaguest notion about the Marines--I had heard of the Banana Wars, and China and (unclear), but I knew very little about the Marine Corps. But I was very impressed by the attitude and the dedication and the sincerity of that Marine

Recruit Sergeant. We talked and he said, "Well, I'll find a place for you."

Mr. Simmons: Was he pretty salty?

Mr. Elrod: Very salty. And so I said, "Well, I'm going to join your outfit but I need three days. I've got to go sell my car and quit my job." So I came back and they didn't have an officer in Amarillo, so he gave me a voucher for a railway ticket to Oklahoma City and a voucher for a place to stay there and food, and I was told where to report. I was sworn in, into the Marine Corps on September 16, 1940. There were four or five other young men from one place or another who were there when we were--I think there were six of us that were sworn in at the same time.

Mr. Simmons: And this was in--?

Mr. Elrod: In Oklahoma City.

Mr. Simmons: In Oklahoma City. So, you shipped out by train, I assume, to boot camp?

Mr. Elrod: If you joined the Marine Corps west of the Mississippi, you went to boot camp in San Diego. If you were east of the Mississippi, you went to Parris Island. So, we were given vouchers for upper deck on the Pullman--

Mr. Simmons: Really?

Mr. Elrod: --and we were (given) vouchers for food and so forth on the train. I went right back through Amarillo and down through El Paso and out to Los Angeles--.

Mr. Simmons: You had a Pullman! You're the first person I've ever met that actually got anything but a day seat on a train.

Mr. Elrod: Well, we had upper berths, but each one of us was carrying a folder with our records, and it was each individual by himself. We had no connection, really, with each other. I don't recall having too much association with the other people.

Mr. Simmons: Yeah. How long did it take you to get to--?

Mr. Elrod: We were on the train a half a day, a night, a full day, a half a day into Los Angeles. We changed trains in Los Angeles, and one of the group disappeared. I was under the impression that he had just signed up for the Marine Corps to get a free trip to California. That was still in the depression time and this fellow just wanted to get to California. I never knew what became of him.

Mr. Simmons: Well, okay. That's desertion (unclear).

Mr. Elrod: I've often wondered if anybody ever tried to pursue him, but I'm sure he would have been caught when the draft passed.

Mr. Simmons: Yeah, I was going to say, he would've been caught in the dragnet there sometime or other. So anyhow, you got to San Diego and--

Mr. Elrod: We were met by a Marine corporal, and right away he began yelling at us, telling us it was the sorriest bunch of people he had ever had an encounter with, and he wondered what he had done wrong to have such a bunch of bums, and this carried on all the way out from the railway station out to the Marine Base. That first night, we were all put in a cinder block building, still in our civilian clothes. The next morning we were told to pack up everything in a suitcase and that would either be sent back to our home or it would be stored until our enlistment was up. We signed up for four years. We were stripped naked and started through the process. We first went through a little medical screening, and then we went to a barber shop for a haircut, and then we started marching through to pick up uniforms, and then through a little post exchange area where we were given a two-and-a-half gallon bucket, and this bucket was filled with toilet articles and cleaning gear and so forth that we would need. Then we were marched over to a tent area. At that time they were dredging out San Diego harbor, and they had been pumping the sand up and these tents were on that fill area. It was soft, so there were duck board walks and duck board floors in the tents. They were two-man tents and we had a little kerosene stove that sat--

Mr. Simmons: It wasn't a pup tent, was it? (Unclear, both speaking together).

Mr. Elrod: No, it was a little two-man tent. It had walls, and we had canvas cots with a pad on it and two blankets.

Mr. Simmons: And this was--was this a pretty brand new installation?

Mr. Elrod: The Marine Corps had just apparently decided to start to expand. The Marine Corps that I joined was just a little over 19,000. It was smaller than the New York City police force at that time. It had hit a low in 1936, about 13,000. Our tent area for our recruit platoon was very close to the more established part of the Marine Base, so I would say we were one of the early platoons that were in that area.

Mr. Simmons: In the more established part of the Marine Base, did they have wooden barracks?

Mr. Elrod: No, this was a very nice--it was Spanish style of barracks. The Marine Base and the Navy Base were right adjacent to each other. It was a pretty well established thing. I suspect it was probably built in the '20s or thereabout.

Mr. Simmons: Yeah. Okay. It sounds pretty nice. So, they were not too gentle with you, I assume?

Mr. Elrod: The boot camp then was thirteen weeks and we had a sergeant and two corporals that were our drill instructors. They were--one of them was there at all times; sometimes more. We were never left unemployed from a little before daylight until about dark.

Mr. Simmons: Did you have--what size platoon (unclear)?

Mr. Elrod: I would say it was probably around twenty or twenty-five.

Mr. Simmons: Okay. Pretty small.

Mr. Elrod: I have pictures of it, but I haven't counted them.

Mr. Simmons: How long was boot camp?

Mr. Elrod: Thirteen weeks.

Mr. Simmons: How many of the people that started in your platoon got to the end of it?

Mr. Elrod: As far as I know, all of them did.

Mr. Simmons: Okay. Because a lot of times you get people who are bed wetters or have some--.

Mr. Elrod: Well, there were three boys from Hollywood, whose parents were involved in the movie industry, and they stuck together very tightly. One of them was a tent mate of mine, and we never actually became friends. We weren't enemies, but those three felt like they were better than everybody else. They disappeared shortly after the end of boot camp. At that time, it was my understanding that for \$300, a recruit could be bought out. I guess the government recovered their money.

Mr. Simmons: Sounds like the old Civil War days where the people could pay somebody to take their enlistment in the Union Army.

Mr. Elrod: Well, I have an idea their parents--maybe they had run away. I don't know what; I never asked and never really cared, but they just disappeared.

Mr. Simmons: Now, you went through rifle training during--

Mr. Elrod: Yes, we had one week on the rifle range.

Mr. Simmons: And that was Camp Elliot?

Mr. Elrod: No, we went out to a rifle range that was out toward Torrey Pines. I don't know the name of it; it was just referred to as the rifle range. I had grown up shooting rifles in Texas from the time I was five years old, so I had absolutely no trouble making expert.

Mr. Simmons: Yeah. With the '03?

Mr. Elrod: With the '03. It kicked like a mule!

Mr. Simmons: But it was a beautiful shooting gun.

Mr. Elrod: It was incredibly accurate.

Mr. Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Elrod: It held five rounds, bolt action.

Mr. Simmons: And you fired it up to 500 yards?

Mr. Elrod: Yes. We fired 100 yards, 200, and 500.

Mr. Simmons: Okay. And rapid fire and slow (unclear)?

Mr. Elrod: Yes. They had a specific course that you (unclear). You fired both the rifle and the pistol.

Mr. Simmons: Okay, and of course, it was the old 1911 Colt pistol.

Mr. Elrod: Yes.

Mr. Simmons: Which you'd be hard to hit a barn with (unclear).

Mr. Elrod: Well, one of the best pistol shots later told me that it took 20,000 rounds to really become an expert.

Mr. Simmons: I can believe that.

Mr. Elrod: Boot camp actually was relatively easy for me, because I had learned how to take care of a uniform and so forth at A&M, and I knew the old eight-man squad drill from every position. I was in excellent condition because I had been doing construction work. For the first half the time that I was in boot camp, I felt more like an observer than a participant. Finally, about halfway through, I came to the conclusion; I said, "These people are serious about this. Maybe I would like to be one of them." And that's when they finally accomplished the purpose of converting me from a civilian into a Marine. And when we were lined up for our graduation, an officer with the hardest blue eyes I had ever seen was walking down in front of us, and every once in a while he would just reach over and tap someone on the chest. That happened to me, and it turned out that was Marine Gunner Jim Crow, who was a legend in his own time. He had enough horsepower, even as a Marine Gunner, which is a warrant officer, to come to recruit camp and pick out his platoon.

Mr. Simmons: Whoa!



Mr. Elrod: They were just reorganizing the Eighth Marines, which had been disbanded at the end of World War II (World War I), and when I graduated from boot camp, I went to Camp Elliot, which was another tent camp. We lived in the same kind of tents that had the same canvas cots, had the same little kerosene stove. We started in, as the platoon began to fill out, we started in first having our individual training and then squad training and--.

Mr. Simmons: And you were doing infantry tactics?

Mr. Elrod: Infantry tactics, yes. I was in what they called the regimental headquarters, but I was assigned to the anti-tank platoon.

Mr. Simmons: You were learning to use all the crew-served weapons like the light and heavy .30 and .50 caliber machine guns?

Mr. Elrod: Yeah, and the Browning Automatic Rifle.

Mr. Simmons: The B.A.R.

Mr. Elrod: And we were armed with a little old .37 that had been invented by the French in World War I to attack machine gun emplacements. It was actually totally useless for anything, but we had that weapon up until just a few weeks before World War II started, and we were given the modern 37 millimeter cannons.

Mr. Simmons: What was the difference between the two cannons?

Mr. Elrod: Well, the diameter of the projectile was the same, but the one for the new gun was much more powerful. We could penetrate an

inch and a half of armor at a thousand yards with the armor piercing shells.

Mr. Simmons: Just a higher velocity?

Mr. Elrod: No, well see, the old gun weighed 112 pounds; the new gun weighed 910 pounds. It had two wheels--the old gun could be towed by two men just on a cart and you could either fire it on two wheels or take it off and fire it on a tripod. The new gun had split rails and a jeep was the prime mover for it. It could be pulled on level ground by individuals but you couldn't pull it very far.

Mr. Simmons: So it was a real--

Mr. Elrod: It was a real weapon. It would have been useless against anything the Germans had, but we could kill anything that the Japanese had. We had three types of ammunition: armor piercing, high explosive, and canister. As it turned out, canister was the valuable weapon for it in the Pacific. This canister shell was like a large shotgun shell; it had 102 steel balls in it.

Mr. Simmons: What was the effective range of that?

Mr. Elrod: Out to a thousand yards, we could penetrate an inch and a half of armor.

Mr. Simmons: With those--with the canister shot?

Mr. Elrod: No, with the armor piercing.

Mr. Simmons: I was starting to say--

Mr. Elrod: With the armor piercing.

Mr. Simmons: Yeah, with the A.P.--

Mr. Elrod: Canister was probably good up to a hundred yards.

Mr. Simmons: Yeah, okay. Okay.

Mr. Elrod: At the end of nine months, I was given an exam for promotion to private first class. It wasn't an automatic thing; you had to qualify for it. Now there were 100 oral questions, and we had to be able to strip and assemble every weapon that the platoon had, blindfolded, in a specific amount of time.

Mr. Simmons: Okay now, you are a regimental headquarters company, weapons platoon--?

Mr. Elrod: Unclear.

Mr. Simmons: Okay, so you--

Mr. Elrod: Shortly before World War II, this was split and the regimental headquarters company kept the communications and the administrative work, and they established the regimental weapons company. The old anti-tank platoon grew into the regimental weapons company. This was three platoons of the new 37 millimeter guns, plus all the supporting type of people that were needed.

Mr. Simmons: Okay, but beside the 37 millimeters, you'd have something like the 4.2 mortars, or--?

Mr. Elrod: No, the mortars were attached to the various battalions, and they had weapons companies in the battalion, but those had the mortars.

Mr. Simmons: Okay, so the regimental weapons company only had those 37s--

Mr. Elrod: Those 37s. Now we had air-cooled machine guns. We had one of those for each one of the Jeeps that pulled--.

Mr. Simmons: Fifty caliber?

Mr. Elrod: Thirty caliber.

Mr. Simmons: Thirty caliber? Okay. I'm sorry to be getting into so much detail here, but this is fascinating to me because a lot of this detail has been lost over the years, I think, to a large extent so...

Mr. Elrod: Well, ask me as many (unclear) parts as you want to know.

Mr. Simmons: This is really good background for us here at the museum. Okay, so you're there at Camp Elliott and you took your exam for your PFC promotion.

Mr. Elrod: So I was promoted to PFC after about nine months.

Mr. Simmons: Then what happened to you, okay, we're getting into 1941 now.

Mr. Elrod: What we were doing there at Camp Elliott was going back over individual training, then squad training, then platoon, and then we began to have the battalion training and regimental training. It was a very detailed training system, and in the summer of '41, by this time the Eighth Marine Regiment is ready to try some regimental type activities.

Mr. Simmons: Now, were you, was this the whole regiment was at Camp Elliott??

Mr. Elrod: We're still at Camp Elliott.

Mr. Simmons: Okay.

Mr. Elrod: There was a period of time; probably the late spring of '41, they started building the wooden buildings for Camp Elliott. We moved back into the Marine Base then, and were living in the permanent structures on the Marine Base.

Mr. Simmons: In San Diego.

Mr. Elrod: That lasted a month or two, maybe as much as three months, and then Camp Elliott was completed and we moved back out there into the new barracks.

Mr. Simmons: Okay, so you were back at the Recruit Depot area.

Mr. Elrod: Well, the Recruit Depot by this time had really grown, and it was further out into this fill area than it was when I was there, but I had no connection with it during the time we were back there.

Mr. Simmons: The same base.

Mr. Elrod: The same base; it was in the same location. It's just that I'm now an active, full-fledged Marine.

Mr. Simmons: Yeah. And have you had any chance for leave during this nine months or so?

Mr. Elrod: I got--when we joined the company out of boot camp, the first sergeant welcomed us and so forth, and said, "I don't want to see you in my tent until you've been in the organization a year, unless you're sent there on official duty." He let us know that he was going to be in charge of things, and sometime around late September or early October, when my year was up, I got a fifteen day leave, and I went back to Muleshoe. I rode a bus both ways, so I had fifteen days.

Mr. Simmons: What did you do in off-base activity then, during the time you were there at Camp Elliott?

Mr. Elrod: Off-base?

Mr. Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Elrod: On Christmas, after I had gotten out of boot camp, I hadn't been in the unit very long, but we had been given a 72-hour pass. My tent mate and I went up to Los Angeles, and it was rainy and messy, and I said, "You know, this is stupid, us walking around in the rain. Let's go buy a car." So he and I went over and we bought a 1935 Austin for \$125.00. I paid \$15.00 down and he paid \$10.00 down, and our monthly payment was going to be \$10.00. So now we had transportation. Camp Elliott was about 12 or 15 miles out of San Diego and it was very difficult to get back and forth. Theoretically, there was a bus but you never knew when it was coming, and he and I decided, hey, what we

would do, one of us, when we have time off, if people wanted to go into San Diego, we would take up to five of them at twenty-five cents, and we would drive them into the Y, the YMCA, and if there was anybody that wanted to go back to camp, we'd take them back for twenty-five cents. So we made money enough doing that taxi-type thing to make our \$10.00 a month car payment and get four new tires for the vehicle. If they wanted to go to Tijuana, we would take them for a dollar, but there had to be five, and if they wanted to go to Los Angeles, we would taken them for two and a half, but there had to be five.

Mr. Simmons: What was the PFC's pay in 1941?

Mr. Elrod: Let's see; twenty-one (dollars) was the base pay. I think it was maybe six dollars a month more, and I was getting five dollars a month rifle money, and then I was a fifth-class specialist and I got another three, I think another three dollars a month. So I was making, as a PFC, I was making about what a corporal would make. I would make about forty-four dollars a month.

Mr. Simmons: Not bad for that time!

Mr. Elrod: No, I was doing fine.

Mr. Simmons: Well, we're getting into 1941 now, and they're gearing up for the war. Is the draft started by this time?

Mr. Elrod: The draft started some time in about--I don't know the exact date because, you know, I wasn't seriously involved with it. But we

had decided; at least the powers that be decided that we would do some real serious activity as a regiment. I think no one had ever tried to move a full-sized regiment on foot for any distance, so we made a 180-mile hike with a full regiment, and we did it in nine days. We averaged about twenty miles a day, which the word was, that that was the longest ground march that had been made since the Civil War.

Mr. Simmons: Where did you go?

Mr. Elrod: We looped out through the back of San Diego County, over the mountains, out into the desert, then back over the mountains and into San Diego through El Cajon.

Mr. Simmons: I'm amazed there would be that much land that would be available to get that many people, but you had to have vehicles, right?

Mr. Elrod: Well, the vehicles carried the bedrolls and so forth. We got a hot breakfast and a hot lunch, then a hot dinner. Of course, they would move the cooks forward but we slept in pup tents at night. We went with what they call light marching order and all of our weapons. At that time, we still had that first little old .37 and it was pulled along on a cart by hand.

Mr. Simmons: You said it was 120 pounds?

Mr. Elrod: It weighed 110 pounds.

Mr. Simmons: 110, so it was--?



Mr. Elrod: On wheels, almost like bicycle wheels.

Mr. Simmons: Well, I started to say, the barrel would seem like it would weigh 100 pounds on a 37 millimeter.

Mr. Elrod: It was only about, I guess, twenty inches long. It was a piece of junk, to be absolutely honest.

Mr. Simmons: Okay. I'm sorry; I just keep thinking of that--.

Mr. Elrod: Well, you can ask anything you want. You'll get an honest answer.

Mr. Simmons: Okay. So you finished this 180 mile march and then you got back to camp. Everybody felt--you had a write-up about it?

Mr. Elrod: The papers gave it extensive coverage. I have a very nice scrapbook and there are a lot of pictures of it.

Mr. Simmons: And training continued, and--

Mr. Elrod: Yes. We were beginning--we got lots of chance to fire our weapons. They had an area they called "M Range." It was land that they had confiscated or taken by eminent domain, and it was a good place. We could shoot any weapon we had there.

Mr. Simmons: Were you by chance shooting old World War I ammunition, leftover ammunition?

Mr. Elrod: I am sure that this was old ammunition, but I don't recall-- maybe there was an occasional misfire. I don't recall ever having one myself.

Mr. Simmons: When did they start putting together the division?

Mr. Elrod: The division wasn't formed until after Guadalcanal, the Second Division.

Mr. Simmons: Okay, so you started the war as the Eighth Regiment and you shipped out (unclear, both talking together). You shipped out as a regiment.

Mr. Elrod: Okay. When we were in these permanent barracks at Camp Elliott and we had gotten the new .37s, we had a chance to shoot them some. It was on Sunday when we got word that Pearl Harbor had happened, and Sundays were messy times in the barracks. The rest of the time everything was clean, but on Sundays, there was scattered newspapers around; people running around in their skivvies and so forth. Very shortly after the radio announcement, the staff NCOs began to come in, and they got everybody into field gear with field marching equipment, and issued everybody two bandoliers of ammunition. By the time that was done, then the officers came, so it was decided that we'd turn the ammunition back in, and then after an hour or two the ammunition was reissued, and then it was decided--by this time you're hearing over the radio the Japanese have been seen off the coast of California, that they had landed down below Tijuana--and it was decided that we would move up on the hills behind Camp Elliott. We went up there and dug foxholes and it started to rain. It pretty much rained off and on for about four

days. And here we were up in the mud and we could look down and see our nice dry barracks. It was absolute, utter confusion. All kinds of reports were coming in. One night in a pitch black dark night, we were told to get aboard trucks. We went down and got on these trucks and they were driving in the night with blackout, and I was sure the truck was going to run off the road, turn over and kill us all. We went out two Fort Rosecrans, at the end of Point Loma, and they put us into abandoned ammunition bunkers and we were given some water-cooled fifty calibers on a pedestal, a mount, and the deal was we were supposed to protect the airfield on Coronado.

Mr. Simmons: Water-cooled fifties?

Mr. Elrod: With old water-cooled fifties. We had plenty of ammunition but we only had a hundred links, which meant we could make about one belt and then we put a sandbag over the ejection port to catch the brass and those clips, and then the deal was to run back down and reload the belts. It was idiocy, utter idiocy. If this thing, if planes had come in, the hundred rounds would have been about enough to show where we were and then we'd have been wiped out. Well, this went on; we were doing four on and four off, sleeping on concrete slab in these bunkers with our shelter half and our piece of canvas that we rolled our bedroll in, and our two blankets. We were wet and we were cold.

Mr. Simmons: Did you have sleeping bags?

Mr. Elrod: No.

Mr. Simmons: Okay.

Mr. Elrod: No, we would put this canvas shelter half down and then we'd put down this little piece of canvas that we rolled our sleeping bags in--I mean our sleeping roll--then we had the two blankets and that was it.

Mr. Simmons: You said--what was the sleeping roll?

Mr. Elrod: It was a little pad, and--

Mr. Simmons: Okay. It was something (unclear)--

Mr. Elrod: It wasn't something we could carry with us, but actually had been taken off our bunk--our canvas cots. We did that for, I don't know, several days. I don't remember how many days. I guess by then we're getting orders that we're going to go overseas. We were taken out of that and I guess someone knew I had some experience in construction, and I was taken up to a wholesale gasoline and oil place, and we were given loose pieces of metal--of wood, to make a crate that would hold two five-gallon oil cans. Actually, it was the kind of can they used to ship oil, you know, cooking oil and so forth, to grocery stores. Very thin metal. I supervised the building of those crates for several days. By this time, the government had confiscated three Matson steamship liners, the Monterey, the Matsonia and the

Lurline, because they didn't have anything to take us overseas with. After I had done this ammunition crate build--I mean oil crate build--they were putting gasoline in it, my platoon sergeant called me down and put me in charge of loading the number one hold on the Lurline. It turns out we were loading ammunition. Here I am, a PFC in charge of this thing. I've never been on a ship in my life; nobody told me how to load a ship. I just had to use my own judgment. We did that for several days. They had civilian crews up welding gun tubs and machine guns and so forth on the Matson liners. They had the civilian crews still aboard. I guess it took us about three or four days to load, and then we started out of the harbor. Part of my mystery had been solved; about the time we got to the mouth of the harbor, the platoon sergeant came by and handed me my corporal chevrons, and said I had been promoted to corporal; so that told me why I was in charge of the detail. The ship was so heavily loaded that my--by now I'm a squad leader--my squad slept on cots out on the deck. We did have canvas overhead but it was pretty much useless because with the ship underway, if there was any rain or anything, it would blow right back in there. We had a pretty miserable time until we began to get down into warmer climate. Because, see, we sailed on January 6, after December 7. We found out that we were going to Samoa, and the reason that we

were going to Samoa was to build an airfield to block the Japs off from stopping shipping from the states to Australia and New Zealand. Once we got to warmer climate, then out on the deck was fairly comfortable. I had decided that we could probably set this .37 up on the deck and use it as extra defense. So I talked to the people on the ship, and we got three heavy timbers, and I chained those down so they could act as braces for the trail spades on the gun. We set it up so we could shoot off the side of the ship, and no one believed that it would amount to anything, but somehow I managed to convince the powers that be to have one of the destroyers sail by and throw some crates over. We surprised everybody; we hit the crates. So then they decided maybe this guy knows what he's talking about (Both laugh). I had the notion that we might even be able to hit the periscope on a submarine. I don't know if that could've happened but...

Mr. Simmons: How long did it take you to get--?

Mr. Elrod: We were about--around sixteen days. It was quite a time. After ten or twelve days, we picked up some destroyers and an aircraft carrier as escort and we started zig-zagging. The first day that the carrier was there, they were going to have a combat patrol morning and evening off the carrier with the planes. So when the first plane started taking off, everybody was watching, and it went off and it wobbled a little bit and went in the drink. They

had a destroyer coming behind it; I guess they picked the crew up. So we watched the number two plane come and he wobbled a little bit and went in the drink. And what I suspect, that these were pilots that were--this was probably the first time they'd ever taken off. Everything was jammed up, and so now everybody's holding their breath. Number three plane came wobbling, wobbling and took to the air, and all rest of them got off the deck. But it was--we were woefully unprepared. We went to Saipan and Guadalcanal with World War I equipment, the old flat helmet--

Mr. Simmons: Yeah, I know; it's pretty sad. What happened then and what did you do when you got to Samoa?

Mr. Elrod: Right away, they ordered my .37 unloaded and we set up to protect the harbor, Apia harbor. Actually we could have done some good there. I guess the other .37s were put on the opposite point, and I stayed there for oh, several weeks. I don't remember just how long. Then I moved around over to the side of the island where they were building the airfield. Samoa was so rugged that there wasn't any place to build the airfield on the island, so they were quarrying coral and dumping it into a shallow bay to build the airfield. My gun position was very near one side of the field they were working on, and one day, the civilian that was in charge of it came and said, "Could I hire

your Marines in off-duty time to drive my big Euclid dump trucks?" He said, "I just had a Samoan trained to drive it and the first load, he backed up and when he was about back to where he was supposed to dump, he panicked and jumped out and the truck went in the drink." So I said, "Well, I don't mind if they want to do that a little bit." So they would go over and drive the trucks, and I'm pretty sure that they were given Samoan names, but anyway, they got a little bit of extra money. And it didn't interfere; I kept two people at the gun all the time.

Mr. Simmons: How long did all this take place, then?

Mr. Elrod: Well, I was again there--I guess we had been on the island maybe, maybe three months, something like that. Anyway, the company commander came one day and said, "We don't have anybody on Western Samoa. So I would like for you to go over there." And they sent my squad and another one; there were actually fourteen of us that went over. We went about ninety miles from Western Samoa--I mean from American Samoa to Western Samoa. The New Zealanders controlled it, and they had a few New Zealand troops there. Of course, they didn't expect us and they didn't know what to do, but we had one gun set up on the north side of the island. Again, they were building an airfield there. My gun was set up on the south side. We had taken over a little bit of food; we had ammunition for our guns.



When that food was eaten up, we could go into the bush stores and buy a little bit with whatever money we had. And then when we spent our money, I said, "Well hell, what are we going to do?" I went into bush store and signed up in the name of the United States of America, Corporal Roy Elrod. I don't know if they ever got paid or not, but I didn't know if I had the authority to do it, but we were hungry.

Mr. Simmons: Couldn't the New Zealand troops feed you? Or were you not close enough to their--?

Mr. Elrod: We were off out by ourselves.

Mr. Simmons: I see.

Mr. Elrod: And there weren't that many of their troops there. I saw hardly any of them. We decided that we should have some kind of a vehicle to kind of patrol morning and evening along the coast, and so I requisitioned a small, little old beaten up truck. And again I signed in the name of the United States, Corporal Elrod. So we would patrol about twelve or fifteen miles every morning and every evening. Again, I kept two people on the gun, twenty-four/seven. We lived in native huts there, and we were there about nine weeks, and one morning here come ships but they had American flags. I went down to the shore; this colonel was coming ashore, and I saluted and I said, "Sir, we turn over the command of the island." And he said, "Who the hell are you?"

(Mr. Simmons laughs). And I said, "Well I'm Corporal Elrod, and we've held onto this place until you got here. Can you get us back to American Samoa?" And he started laughing like crazy; he said, "I can do that." So anyway, I went back over to where my gun was and pretty soon, here comes a motorcycle with a sidecar, and there's an officer in the motorcycle with a case of beer on his lap. It turns out that was Bruno Hochmuth, who was then a captain, but he had known me at A&M, and I guess he heard my name and so he came over with a case of beer and so I decided I should put on a demonstration for him. We got three oil barrels and tied them together, and I had these two Samoans take one of the native outrigger canoes -- they called them pau pau's. I told them to pull it out until I waved my hat, and I said, "Then cut it loose, because when I wave my hat we're going to start shooting at that barrel." So he took it out nine hundred or a thousand yards. I waved my hat; you would have thought that thing had a motor on it! So we were firing training ammunition and it had a tracer in it; the tracer burned the full time. So I knew I had a good gunner and so he fired; the first shot went over because the barrels are round, see? But the second shot hit; you could see that it ignited the residue in there. You could see the smoke and Hochmuth was very impressed. But it turned out that he was later the senior casualty in Vietnam,

the senior American casualty. He was--his helicopter went down and killed him. He had--he was a two-star general then. But anyway, I'm getting ahead there. But when we were about ready to go back, when they got ready to unload their ships, we had gone around and went aboard the ship. This was on a Saturday morning, and there was one of the captains from the defense battalion that had come in there, but nothing was happening. Being nosy, I went over and I said what it is. The ship's first lieutenant, who was actually the second in command on the ship, said, "Well the crew is all maritime union and we don't work on the weekend." So I had looked at the hoist; there was a hoist at each end of this Liberty ship and there were three levers. One was the boom up and down; one was hook up and down; and the other was boom right and left. So I volunteered my Marines to operate the two winches and so we unloaded the ship. Apia Harbor wouldn't let the ships go ashore. They had barges that would come out, and it took us a day and a night, I guess, to unload the ship. When I got back over to American Samoa, I found out I'd been promoted to sergeant while I was gone and in a week or two, here comes a nice letter of commendation that the colonel had written about us helping unload the ship, so that was a feather in my cap.

Mr. Simmons: You're moving right up the promotion ladder!

Mr. Elrod: Yeah (laughs.) Now I'm in charge of two squads of .37s. We're still in a defense position on American Samoa.

Mr. Simmons: Okay. So you're back on American Samoa.

Mr. Elrod: We're on American Samoa now. I had my two guns over on the north side of the island at a place called Fagasa Bay. American Samoa was so rugged that anything that went to this place on the north side had to go by boat around the island. There was a foot trail up over the mountain and by the time we had been there awhile, they got it so that a Caterpillar tractor could pull things up. I guess I had been there maybe another month, and they sent another, newer regiment down to relieve us, and for the first time now, the Eighth Marine Regiment is back together again. So, Crow called me in one day and said, "They've come out with a thing called field commission. How would you like to be a second lieutenant?"

Mr. Simmons: Now, Crow was your company commander?

Mr. Elrod: He had been promoted from warrant officer platoon leader; he was promoted directly to captain when it was made the regimental weapons company.

Mr. Simmons: Okay.

Mr. Elrod: So he said, "How would you like to be a second lieutenant?" And I said, "Well, skipper, I guess it's no worse than being a sergeant." So they got together about a hundred and twenty of

us for screening purposes, and we went out to a place called Mormon Valley, and it was just a wooded area, and we had to pitch tents and everything. I guess this was part of the screening process, but they were watching us. This went on for, I don't know, three or four weeks, and they commissioned ninety out of a hundred and twenty. Forty-five were made warrant officers, and forty-five were made second lieutenants. I was one of the second lieutenants. They transferred everyone to at least a different battalion to get them away from their enlisted people, except me. I went back and took over the same platoon that I had been a three-striper in. I don't know what happened to that lieutenant, and I thought it was wise not to ask, but he was not there when I got back. So now, the platoon sergeant that had been my boss is my number two.

Mr. Simmons: What did you think of that lieutenant that had been there before?

Mr. Elrod: Well, I hadn't been particularly impressed with him, and I guess Crow wasn't impressed with him, either. He had so much clout that he could pretty much dictate what he wanted. So apparently he just got rid of that lieutenant. But anyway, to tell you how much he had, he had us all together after this other unit had come in, because we were getting ready to go somewhere. We didn't know where. One day, the regimental commander, now, had been promoted to brigadier. He was "Heavy Henry" Larsen,

and he drove up into this area where the regimental weapons company was. Crow insisted that his company have its own mess hall, and he had this sergeant cook, Elijah J. Bell, with a big, drooping red mustache. The general drove up and I happened to be in earshot, and he said, "Jim, General so-and-so"-- who was the three-star down there; I can't remember his name -- "is coming in, and I don't have a thing in the world to feed him." And Crow bellowed out, "Bell! Bring the general one of those hams! No, bring the general two of those hams!" (Mr. Simmons laughs). Well, there were ten canned hams and the general said, "Jim, Jim. I knew you could take care of me." So anyway, I had been commissioned; I'd had a jeep when I was a sergeant but I turned it in. Crow, I guess, wanted to keep me from having delusions of grandeur. Anyway, General Larsen was having these new officers come in, one or two every so often, to get acquainted and I guess just to look us over. So I had started walking out of the camp then. Crow had his tent where he could see, and he said, "Where are you going?" And I said, "Well, I've been invited to the general's for dinner." "Go get your jeep." So I got my jeep back.

Mr. Simmons: Those old gunners pretty much walked on water, especially in the old Corps.

Mr. Elrod: Yeah. We loaded out to go to Guadalcanal in September--in the first part of October.

Mr. Simmons: Okay. So, Guadalcanal would have been going on since August, and you were all aware of what--you kept up to date on how the battle was going?

Mr. Elrod: My memory is that my platoon landed in Guadalcanal on the last day of October. Now the records say that it was November, but they had boats waiting for my .37s when the ship dropped the anchor, because they were anxious to get those guns in with the canister.

Mr. Simmons: So, the First Division didn't have an adequate number of .37s?

Mr. Elrod: They had them but those guys were getting really worn out; they really were.

Mr. Simmons: Okay, so you all were just beefing up--

Mr. Elrod: They were in terrible shape.

Mr. Simmons: Yeah. August, September, October is three months and they hadn't had any--

Mr. Elrod: They had had hardly any respite. They were in bad shape physically, and exhausted.

Mr. Simmons: You came in on the beach to Guadalcanal with your guns near Henderson Field, is that right?

Mr. Elrod: What they were trying to do was protect Henderson, and it wasn't until we got there that we could actually form a

perimeter, a complete perimeter. What they'd been doing before is doing a lot of heavy patrolling to try to find where the Japs were going to hit. They'd reinforce that, back and forth. There was some of that that took place the first month or so I was there. I moved from first one unit to the other, wherever they thought there was going to be an attack.

Mr. Simmons: So you were pretty much a mobile--kind of a mobile reserve.

Mr. Elrod: Right. Well, I was in the line all the time, but I did move, and that went on, probably until some time in December. By December, then, I was moved over and I was, if you imagine the perimeter like that, the ocean here, my platoon was the last unit in the line over here, right at the mouth of the Matanikau, and I tied into the ocean, and the reason I was there, water from the Matanikau and the wave action created a sand bar, and even at high tide, the water wasn't much more than knee-deep. The .37 platoon from the First Division that had been there in front of me knocked out five Japanese tanks, and they were sitting on the sand bar. At night, Japs would crawl in and then would snipe at me from the tanks, so we would fire armor piercing and killed the sniper. That went on every day, and finally after a little time had passed, I convinced somebody to let me have some engineers and we put charges under them and blew them up, just blew them totally apart.



Mr. Simmons: Was your whole regiment on line then? (Both talking together).

Mr. Elrod: Yeah, the whole regiment was in place.

Mr. Simmons: So the Eighth came in; did any of the First Division units pull out did they consolidate?

Mr. Elrod: No, the First started pulling out when the Army began coming in.

Mr. Simmons: So that was way later.

Mr. Elrod: Some time in the middle of December. I'm not sure exactly when Vanderbilt turned the command over, but it was sometime in December. Our unit was beginning to suffer from lack of food and malaria, dengue, jungle rot, all that stuff that happened. It was--it got so bad, we were running so short of men that we weren't allowed to have anyone go back to the aid station unless their fever was over 104. The corpsmen would patch people up, but--

Mr. Simmons: You were living in foxholes?

Mr. Elrod: Foxholes, yeah.

Mr. Simmons: And a lot of rain?

Mr. Elrod: We were literally starving.

Mr. Simmons: Why was it--I mean, this is months after the battle started. They were still not getting food support?

Mr. Elrod: It got worse all the time. The Navy didn't do much about supplies. When the First Division landed there, they didn't get

all their stuff ashore, and the same thing happened again when we landed. Fletcher was much more worried about his ships than he was about the Marines. So food and hand grenades and mortar ammunition was scarce.

Mr. Simmons: I was thinking Halsey had pretty much straightened the situation out with Fletcher before October. I guess that was the wrong time frame.

Mr. Elrod: No, that wasn't the case.

Mr. Simmons: Okay.

Mr. Elrod: I weighed 195 pounds when I landed. I weighed 160 when I left, and I was in better shape than most. If we hadn't captured as much Japanese rice as we did, we probably would've actually had people die of starvation. We were more than hungry; we were starving.

Mr. Simmons: Were you still getting a lot of infiltration into the lines, the Japanese coming in?

Mr. Elrod: Not many ever got through, but we were still having them peck away, first one place and then the other. They never had a solid attempt to approach. Sometimes there was nobody in front of you, and then sometimes here they came. So, we were constantly making patrols to discover where the next strike would go.

Mr. Simmons: Were you just staying in one spot with your .37 in place?

Mr. Elrod: After the first five weeks or six weeks, I pretty much would stay in the same place. I stayed there at the mouth of the Matanikau quite a while.

Mr. Simmons: But I mean you were with the .37. You weren't out on foot patrols.

Mr. Elrod: No. I did my share of patrol.

Mr. Simmons: Okay, so your .37 crews would go (unclear, both speaking together).

Mr. Elrod: Oh, yeah. I would leave people on the gun, and the patrols were different size. Sometimes it would maybe only a few men. The largest one I took out was about fourteen men, two squads. We were out two nights. Sometimes you went out and back the same day. The trick we would use, we would try to find a place where there weren't many Japs to go out, and the same type of thing coming back. I always went to great lengths to talk to the officers before I was planning to come back in, to make sure that nothing happened when we were trying to get back in.

Mr. Simmons: Did you have radio contact when you were on patrol?

Mr. Elrod: The radios were useless there. The only radios that we had on Guadalcanal that did any kind of work were the ones that the company commanders could use to talk to battalion, and then you had to have somebody cranking for power. At the level that

I was, we were using the same communications that they did at Waterloo -- arm and hand signals, runners, voice.

Mr. Simmons: How--if you're patrolling on foot, you've got fourteen Marines or fewer with you out in--behind Japanese lines, how much better or worse did you feel the Americans did in jungle warfare?

Mr. Elrod: We were getting pretty good.

Mr. Simmons: But the Japanese had been pretty good.

Mr. Elrod: I don't know that they were any better than we were.

Mr. Simmons: Okay.

Mr. Elrod: And I don't know if they were any better off. I think they were as hungry as we were.

Mr. Simmons: They weren't getting any supplies either, because their supply (unclear, both speaking together).

Mr. Elrod: Oh, yeah. They kept doing it. Now, if it hadn't been for the Air Force, we might have lost there, because they might have just brought in enough people to overpower us. The Air Force sunk a lot of those barges, a lot of those ships.

Mr. Simmons: That's what I mean; they were getting a lot of their stuff was intercepted.

Mr. Elrod: Oh, yeah. The coast watcher system was a lifesaver.

Mr. Simmons: Yeah. Well, you were close enough that you were getting caught in the bombardments of Henderson Field when the Japanese ships would come down?

Mr. Elrod: Yes, but most of their ship bombardment was aimed at the airfield. Very little actually hit us out in the infantry parts.

Mr. Simmons: How far away from the field would you--was your--?

Mr. Elrod: Oh, I would say probably anywhere from a mile to five miles.

Mr. Simmons: Oh, okay. I didn't--I thought it was a closer perimeter to the field than that.

Mr. Elrod: I don't know exactly how far it was from one side to the other, but I would guess five miles, maybe six. In all the time I was there, I never actually saw the airfield. I went by it a lot of times but I never actually saw it.

Mr. Simmons: Did you ever have any firefights when you were out on patrol?

Mr. Elrod: We tried to avoid contact on patrol. I didn't have any contact. I would get far enough back and we were very careful not to be discovered. Now, some did have trouble. One day, one morning, when I was there at the mouth of the Matanikau, I always had somebody on watch out to sea. The Marine that was there said, "Lieutenant, there's something out there." I turned my field glasses out and I said, "That's somebody swimming there." I had this one, one of the real warriors that I had was a little Cajun boy, and I called him Little Beaver. There was some

cartoon in the papers about a little Indian. He was a Cajun and he wasn't very big, but he was a dyed in the wool warrior. He stripped off down to his underpants and took the belt out of his pants and strapped on a knife and said, "Lieutenant, I'll swim out there and see what the trouble is." Well, in a little while, he came bringing in this Marine that just had his regular trousers on, and he had been on a patrol that had gone out in the south side of the island and they had been ambushed. He had sense enough to turn and go inland, and he went in deep and looped all the way around, back behind the Japanese, and got back to the sea, and he knew if he swam long enough he'd get inside the perimeter. He'd been in the water, he said, about two and a half hours, and he'd been out a day or two. He was the only survivor of the patrol, and he had stripped off just except to his pants, and I said, "Why didn't you take your pants off?" Well, he kind of (unclear), he said, "I was afraid the fish would bite off my pecker or my balls." (Both laugh). So I got somebody and they took him back.

Mr. Simmons: From the end of October, then, Guadalcanal wasn't secured until--?

Mr. Elrod: It was, actually about the middle--we left on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February, and actually, the Army finally passed through us

sometime around the latter part of January. I got my Silver Star on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of January for some stuff I did.

Mr. Simmons: Do you want to talk about that a little bit? If you don't mind.

Mr. Elrod: Okay. Do you want me to tell about that now?

Mr. Simmons: Yes, if that's (unclear).

Mr. Elrod: What had happened, the 25<sup>th</sup>, I think it was the 25<sup>th</sup> Army Division, had the 182<sup>nd</sup> Regiment and the 164<sup>th</sup>. The 164<sup>th</sup> were made up of Scandinavians from the Dakotas, and they were warriors. We made them Honorary Marines. The 182<sup>nd</sup>, I don't know where it was from, but it was useless. They were going to pass through us there at the Matanikau and break the Japanese lines so that they could go down to Tassafaronga and so on. They lasted about two hours and they started running away.

Mr. Simmons: This is the 182<sup>nd</sup>?

Mr. Elrod: It's the 182<sup>nd</sup>. One of them came up near to where one of my guns' position was. He was still in the water, and he threw his hands up and fell over. One of my Marines started to go get him, and I said, "Let the son of a bitch drown." Well, he got up and came on in. Pretty soon, one came by, and he had the M-1 rifle. He pitched me his M-1 rifle and two bandoliers of ammunition and said, "Here, Marine, you need this worse than I do." I don't think he knew I was an officer, but I was happy to get that M-1. It actually saved my life a little later. But when

that failed, they decided that they'd have the Marines attack. So sometime, probably after Christmas--I think it was after Christmas--we actually broke through the first line and got up as far as the mouth of the Matanikau. Now my platoon is on the south side of the so-called road that went the length of the island. The reason they had me there is in case any Japanese armor came up the road. We stayed there a week or so, and then it was decided that we would attack again and break the last defense, so that the Army could move freely toward the end. This was, I think it was on the 15<sup>th</sup> of January, and so when the time came to attack, we went--I guess we had gone probably 75 yards or so and there was a machine gun that was firing at us. One of the bullets actually cut my pistol loose from my belt but didn't touch me. I had this M-1 and when I plopped down, I was right beside where the machine gun was firing, but my runner was over on this side. Well, I know that machine gun had to come out of there, because here comes my platoon. I just reached over and grabbed the barrel with my hand and yanked it out of the hole; burned my hand but not too bad. I made a signal to the runner to make a noise, because we could see where the entrance was. They had logs about this big over the top and maybe that much dirt. I had him make a noise and I crawled over the top and two of the ends of the logs were up, and I lifted it up and down there



where the gunner had been that was shooting the machine gun was--he was kneeling and had heard the noise up there and he had his rifle and bayonet pointed toward me. And then a little higher up is where they had been sleeping. There was one laying on his belly there and he was looking. When I lifted this up, he started turning and I had the M-1 in my hand like a pistol. I put it, you know, within six inches of his head. He saw he'd bought the farm. We made eye contact but he hadn't been able to get his rifle around and I shot him. By this time the guy that's kneeling, he's already around and I put two in him. If I'd had to work a bolt, I'd have been dead. So, that broke that line, so it's now clear on the road but the infantry company on my left didn't take the ridge and the ridge had machine guns and mortars on it and it was dropping down the road. So, you know, that bridge [ridge] had to be taken and the company hadn't done it, and Crow told the regimental commander, he said, "I'll send Elrod over." So I took--I left a couple of men on each gun and they beefed me up with runners, with drivers and cooks and whatever, and I went over and reported to this company, and it was a captain and two lieutenants sitting in a hole playing cribbage, and I said, "Well, I've come over to help you." The captain said, "Well, I don't know if we're going to be able to go on." I saw right away why they hadn't taken the hill. I had gone

back and found my pistol and had gotten another holster. I unflapped it but I didn't draw it, and I said, "If you son of a bitches won't fight, stay the hell out of my sight." If I had drawn the pistol, I would have killed them, but the only thing that stopped me, I was afraid it would hold up the attack, so I got their first sergeant and I said, "Top, this is what's going to happen. You tell your guys, every mother's son of them, we're going up that hill." And I said, "Give me two good Marines to help my platoon sergeant in case anybody needs encouragement." And I said, "Have your 60 mortars walk around top; have your machine guns stay about 20 yards in front of us." So we took the hill and when I came back down to report that we were on the hill, the regimental commander was down there with Crow and he had a first lieutenant that he was using like an aide, and he just reached over and took one of his collar bars off and one of his shoulder bars, so I was promoted to first lieutenant right on the spot and given the Silver Star.

Mr. Simmons: Well, it sounds like you sure deserved it.

Mr. Elrod: Fourteen years later, I was at Quantico at a party at a colonel's house, and this guy that had been the captain was there. When my wife and I walked in, he looked up and saw me and he took off out through the kitchen, and somebody else had to take his

wife home. I guess he thought I'd still kill him. I have always been sorry I didn't, but I think I made the right decision.

Mr. Simmons: It's kind of surprising; if the guy had been with the regiment all that time and done all that fighting, why would they have caved in at that time when you were (unclear).

Mr. Elrod: Who knows? Who knows? Maybe he had reached the breaking point. I don't know what his problem was.

Mr. Simmons: I mean, if he had just arrived there you could understand that he was green, but if he's a captain, been around that long, it's strange behavior.

Mr. Elrod: I think the lieutenants, if they'd had a decent leader, would've been all right, but you know, I wondered at the time how much trouble I was going to be in (chuckles), almost at the point of a weapon taking a senior officer's command away from him, but I was told to take the hill. I was going to take the hill or die in the attempt. Of course, Crow knew that, too.

Mr. Simmons: Well, so that was pretty close to the end of your combat.

Mr. Elrod: Yeah. We were relieved pretty soon after that. I guess we were relieved sometime around the first week in February. We went back, and by this time, you know, the Army was a whole lot different. They were getting supplies. My guys were in rags, and the first sergeant and I with a driver went back. We found a tent that had all this Army clothing in it, and he told this

corporal, he said, “You go out and talk to the driver while the lieutenant and I solve our business. So I confiscated two of everything for enough for my guys. So now they had socks and they had underwear and whatever. We got cleaned up and while ships hadn’t come in, and one of my boys came over and he said, “Lieutenant, I come from a long line of Appalachian moonshiners, and I found this wooden tub and I can put us together a pretty good batch of mash.” And I said, “Well, that sounds like a dandy idea to me.” So he mixed it all up and it was still working when the ships came in. We decided, well, we better drink some of this, so my guys were pretty well in their cups when these Army guys started coming by. (Mr. Simmons laughs). Of course we were still skinny as rails, and everybody’s kind of staggering around, and these soldiers were looking like what on earth have we gotten into? This same little Cajun, Little Beaver, had had a little more than some, but he’s lying down on the ground saying, “Don’t let me miss the ship; don’t let me miss the ship.” (Laughs). When we got back aboard ship, nobody had been paid for several months, so immediately gambling started. You know, it was a long trek by ship from there to New Zealand. On board our ship, one guy had wound up with pretty much all the money that was on the ship, because as the games got smaller the pots got bigger and whatever. He had almost a pack

full of money. When we got to New Zealand, he went to one of the smaller hotels and gave the hotel all of this thing and said, "I want to rent this whole floor for my company. When they come in, this'll be a place for them to bring their ladies. Keep beer here until you run out of money." So that was what he did.

Mr. Simmons: What did you think about New Zealand? Where did you go in there?

Mr. Elrod: We landed in Wellington. Now I had realized, when we're leaving Guadalcanal, we're either going to go to Australia or New Zealand; I didn't know which. So I took two Marines and four sandbags and got four skulls and eight thigh bones. So the night before we landed in Wellington, we went down and on each one of my four jeeps, we had a skull and crossbones on the radiator. I wanted the New Zealanders to know somebody had arrived. When we got back out to camp, I threw the thigh bones in the garbage, but the people at regiment wanted the skulls. They sawed them off right above the ears, and used the brain pans for ash trays in the regimental officers' mess. That was the Pacific war. When I told that to the historian, he said, "Do you want that in the book?" I said, "It goes in the book or there isn't going to be a book." The New Zealanders welcomed us with open arms. They felt we had saved them. As a matter of fact, the gal that I wound up dating with most of the time there, her

mother told me that she had gotten two cyanide pills and she had figured on taking one and giving one to my girlfriend when the Japs came. But it was a great place and, see, we were all sick there. Everybody still had malaria and dengue and whatever. For the first, I guess probably the first two months, everybody was just recovering and we were eating like wolves. My normal breakfast was five eggs, bacon or ham, and all. You know, everybody, having been starved, it took us that long to get our health back. We got back some of the people. I landed with 36 and left with 18, but some of them were sick and came back. I don't remember, when I was wounded at Saipan, I never got any of my records back, my wallet, my address book, all of that stuff I never saw again. Anyway, New Zealand was good and the people were incredibly friendly.

Mr. Simmons: How long were you there?

Mr. Elrod: About nine months.

Mr. Simmons: And you got reinforcements (unclear)?

Mr. Elrod: Yeah, and picked up replacements and for the first time, we now had modern helmets and M-1s and so forth. You had asked about the Second Division. That's when it came together. General Smith had one floor of a hotel for headquarters.

Mr. Simmons: That was Julian Smith?

Mr. Elrod: Julian C. We called him Uncle Julian. He was a great guy; a very small, meek looking fellow but had a soul of iron. We had the Second, Sixth, Eighth and Tenth. So now the Second Division is all together. We had wonderful places to train there. We were even able to have division exercises before we sailed. They set up a pretty good false situation; they kept putting the word out that we were going out to go up to Hawks Bay and have a landing exercise and so on. They even hired entertainers to be there. New Zealand was already becoming a fairly liberal minded place, so the dock workers decided that they would go on strike for higher pay and whatever. So he told a company, an infantry company, to fix bayonets, load their rifles and drive every New Zealander off the dock. They were kept off of their docks while we loaded the ships. This was Uncle Julian. See, we had a very narrow window to get into traffic to Tarawa. So, that's how we loaded the ships.

Mr. Simmons: Well, you being an officer, were you aware or you just (unclear); I guess nobody really was aware of the island that you were actually going to hit until you got on board ship?

Mr. Elrod: Here I am, Crow is now a major and has one of the battalions. When they had the division officers' meeting, he took me with him. Here I'm not even in his outfit. He didn't even take his battalion commander or his company commanders; he took me.

Here I'm a first lieutenant sitting in there with all these majors and lieutenant colonels and colonels, and I'm all ears and I hear about the reef. I came away convinced that we weren't going to be able to use our jeeps there. I decided those boats were never going to get across that reef. For the first time, we had enough amphibian tractors to land the first three waves. I think there was 156. The last fifty-some of them didn't reach us until, I guess it was the night before we landed. They had--I've learned all this since, long since, but--these were scheduled to go to England to be used in the landing at Norway--Normandy. So here they had loaded them on trains, took them over, put them on LSTs, and the LSTs at their flank speed of what, ten or fourteen knots--

Mr. Simmons: Ten, maybe.

Mr. Elrod: --and they got there just before we were ready to load on them. You know, they were able to get over the reef.

Mr. Simmons: Yeah, but it's--okay, so when you got to Tarawa--?

Mr. Elrod: What I did, knowing about the reef, we had fording (unclear) for the jeeps but that would only let us go to about less than three feet. I knew the jeeps for--the size of the place was so small. You know they had the sand table showing what it was. Well, we had no idea even at that time where it was or what the name of it was. So I decided the only way we're going to get these



guns ashore is to pull them. So I had rope slings made with a hook and started dragging my guns around camp. It's funny; none of the other platoon leaders picked up on it at all. Most of them always felt like I had some strange kind of an idea anyway; nobody paid any attention. But I was convinced we could do that. So I wondered about ammunition under water, so I got a five-gallon bucket of water and threw a couple handfuls of salt in it, and took two high explosive, two armor-piercing and two canister shells and dropped them in the bucket and left them overnight. Then we took them down and every one of them fired, so I figured okay, they're going to be waterproof. So I managed to tie about 150 rounds of ammunition to each gun. This meant that it was weighing over a thousand pounds, and with the pack that the men had and their load, I figured up afterwards that my guys took over 200 pounds each in through water from halfway to their hips to halfway up to the armpit, 800 yards, almost a half mile.

Mr. Simmons: You hit the outer reef--you were (unclear, both speaking together).

Mr. Elrod: I was in the fourth wave, the first wave of boats. I was supposed to hit the beach.

Mr. Simmons: Well, wait a minute now. You were in the first wave--I thought the first waves were the Amtraks.

Mr. Elrod: Amtraks. The first three waves were Amtraks.

Mr. Simmons: (Speaking together with Mr. Elrod). Three waves were Amtraks, okay, and then the boats came in.

Mr. Elrod: Yeah. My boats hit the reef just as the first wave of Amtraks hit the beach.

Mr. Simmons: Okay.

Mr. Elrod: There was supposed to have been an air strike between the time that the naval gunfire lifted and the time we hit the beach. That air strike never took place. I have never been able to learn what the holdup was. It's been kept a deep, dark secret, why that air strike didn't take place. So the Japs had approximately forty-five minutes, maybe a little bit longer, to take all that stuff that they had to defend the south shore and move it over to the north shore, and you know it was jury-rigged, but you know, they really beefed up that north shore. They were in shell holes or bomb holes, quickly dug emplacements. As a result, the water from the reef into the shore was literally boiling. You know, you'd see big puddles of red where somebody was hit.

Mr. Simmons: The LVTs were coming back out, some of those--

Mr. Elrod: There were, I don't know, maybe a third of them that were still operable. By the time it is over, there probably wasn't more than a dozen that were operable.

Mr. Simmons: Yeah, but a few of them did come back out and they picked up

Mr. Elrod: Two of them kept doing this the whole time. And see, the only way you can get a casualty back would be in one of those but they didn't have ramps on them, so you had to lift people over, or you had to take them in a rubber boat and somebody laid along--it was difficult to evacuate a body. Most, I would say the large percent of the casualties stayed right where they were hit. The corpsmen would do the best they could for them but because there wasn't room behind the seawall, some places at high tide, the water came right in to the seawall.

Mr. Simmons: So you had to--your men--?

Mr. Elrod: Every man in the unit was hooked to the gun--

Mr. Simmons: Okay, you had one gun and how many men?

Mr. Elrod: --except the corporal.

Mr. Simmons: How many men did you have?

Mr. Elrod: Well, the gun crew was six men plus the corporal, and then I had two section leaders and my platoon sergeant, and then I had the guys that were the drivers and whatever, so I probably had eight men hooked to each gun.

Mr. Simmons: How many guys did you have on a (unclear)?

Mr. Elrod: I had four. I had four boats; I had one gun in each boat, and I was in the boat on the right. Then I had a section leader on the boat next to me, a section leader sergeant, a section leader sergeant next to him, and then my platoon sergeant in the left-

hand boat. I had everybody lying in the bottom except one man, a lookout. In the boat that I was in, the corporal was a red-haired boy from Alabama, and this replacement could hear all this stuff landing, and he said, "Red, is them theirs or ours?" And about that time, one hit real close and shell fragments came through the boat, water came aboard, and he said, "Never mind." When we got the guns ashore, we had to lift them over the seawall, but some of Crow's guys helped.

Mr. Simmons: How did you--I didn't think there were many people on the other side of the seawall. I thought that everybody seemed like, because--

Mr. Elrod: No, no. Crow was kicking ass.

Mr. Simmons: Okay. He was getting people over the seawall.

Mr. Elrod: He didn't let people (unclear).

Mr. Simmons: Okay.

Mr. Elrod: Now there were times, you know, when a wave would first hit, they were there, but I would say by the first night, we were fifty or seventy-five yards in.

Mr. Simmons: Okay. So you had your guns up and operating? How long did it--?

Mr. Elrod: Yeah. What I did, I had two guns that were firing straight south across the airfield and they could sweep that whole thing, that would keep anybody, any Japs, from coming back. Then I had

the other two sections turning to the left to expand down that way.

Mr. Simmons: Okay, so you're Red Three (apparently pointing to a map).

Mr. Elrod: Yeah, yeah. I landed right just above where your finger is, and then I'm turning, I'm turning to this tail end of the island with two guns.

Mr. Simmons: Okay, you've got two guns--

Mr. Elrod: And the other two are shooting across that way.

Mr. Simmons: So you've only got about 500 yards this way and (unclear).

Mr. Elrod: It turned out we were right at the bend of the line if there was such a thing. There never was a solid front line.

Mr. Simmons: Did you see any of the Japanese tanks that were active?

Mr. Elrod: I killed two of them.

Mr. Simmons: Okay, you got two.

Mr. Elrod: One of them we got while--before it ever came out of its emplacement, and then the other one was, I think we saw it late on the second day or early on the third day, and it was down near that blockhouse that they had used for their headquarters, moving around. I thought we had just disabled it, but when they interrogated one of the prisoners he said that we had knocked the engine out. It was out of action. You'll find pictures where this concrete blockhouse is, it was two stories, of a tank sitting there. That was the second one. Now they had fourteen tanks there,

and I don't know what happened to the others. They weren't in my zone. Every unit that landed on the north side of the island was badly shot up, missing officers and NCOs and so forth.

Mr. Simmons: How about your; what was your--?

Mr. Elrod: I managed to get in without having a single casualty.

Mr. Simmons: Really?

Mr. Elrod: I saw that they had their machine guns firing in the traditional way, and they were firing bursts, and I could see where it would hit the water. My instructions to the two sergeants and the platoon sergeant was watch my hands. What I would do, I would wade right up; I'd get as close as I am to you, where it was hitting and I'd stop and as soon as they paused, I'd wave. We crossed two bands of machine gun fire. Now you couldn't do anything about the mortar fire and the individual rifle fire and so forth; that was just a chance. But I guess my guys didn't make such a good (unclear); they had to bend down to pull, and so there probably was never more than this much of them. I don't know whether anything was ever really directed at us or not. Now, I lost people after we got ashore. I have deeply regretted that I never got back my notebook that I kept all my records in.

Mr. Simmons: Yeah, yeah. Well, so all the way through, then the first night you guys just hunkered down were you couldn't dig in?

Mr. Elrod: There were two of us that were in the first hole, and you didn't dare move at night, because anybody that was moving at night was considered to be enemy. You might get shot by your own people. A knee mortar round landed right between--we were in kind of a small place, so we were lying, kind of touching each other. It landed right between us; it bruised both of our ribs, but that thing was like a large grenade. It was about that big, and it had a little tap on the end and a little pin, and that tap had to drive that pin back into the primer to explode it. I think our bodies kept that from happening. He says, "Here!" It was hot, and I threw it just as hard as I could and it probably landed on the butt or the side, but it didn't explode. (Chuckles).

Mr. Simmons: Well, was it pretty much chaos on the (unclear)?

Mr. Elrod: It was utter chaos the whole time. The only unit that got ashore intact was the First Battalion, Sixth. They landed on Green Beach and they landed rubber boats. They didn't use their motors because some of those mines were magnetic and some of them were acoustical.

Mr. Simmons: So they paddled ashore then?

Mr. Elrod: Yeah. Green is out at (unclear). Yeah, First Battalion, Sixth.

Mr. Simmons: The Japanese didn't have much down there?

Mr. Elrod: They had lots of mines there, lots of mines across the south side.

Mr. Simmons: But as far as gun emplacements--?

Mr. Elrod: Those rubber boats went over the mines and didn't hit them.

Mr. Simmons: I never heard that story.

Mr. Elrod: We captured over 4,000 mines that they had intended to put on the north shore but hadn't got to put them in place. Bill Jones was the--he was a major--he was the battalion commander of First Battalion, Sixth, and after that we all called him the Admiral of the Condom Fleet. (Both laugh). He later got three stars, and his nephew became commandant, Jim Jones. But Bill Jones--I became quite friendly with him after retirement. He and Crow had been real good buddies and I met him through Crow.

Mr. Simmons: Wow, I don't know what kind of questions to ask. I mean, you-- Tarawa was such a bitter battle and it was so confused.

Mr. Elrod: Well, I think the best thing I can say about that was the individual drive of the individual Marines. A lot of those kids went on their own. Nobody was telling them what to do; they just knew they needed to keep going forward, and they did it to the best of their ability.

Mr. Simmons: I had heard that that is a tradition with the American fighting man, that they're more individualistic. They might be hard to control as a unit, but like the Japanese soldiers were told, were not allowed to do any thinking of their own; they couldn't do anything without somebody telling them and ordering them to do it, and so they were paralyzed if the officers got killed.



Mr. Elrod: That was pretty much the same with the Germans. You know, von Steuben back with George Washington was the one that brought military discipline to the Continental Army. He said, "In Europe, we tell the troops what we want them to do, and then we force them to do it." He said, "Here in the United States, you must tell the troops what you want and why, and they will figure out a way to do it."

Mr. Simmons: Yeah. That's a remarkable insight for that long ago.

Mr. Elrod: Well, it's true. I'm convinced that Americans, if they're properly led, are probably the best warriors in the world.

Mr. Simmons: I would think that that would be a pretty good observation. Well, you've got a lot of fighting going on for two more days here. You've just finished up--well, you knocked out the second tank on the second day.

Mr. Elrod: There were--(unclear) managed to get a copy of Crow's after action report through a historian in the Marine Corps Museum. I didn't even know that there was such a document, but it backed up some things that I had already written. There was this one mound that looked like a hill and it had been very cleverly camouflaged. Dead palm leaves and stuff had been put around on it and there was machine gun fire coming out of it toward the west and toward the south. E Company of Crow's battalion was on my left and I had two guns shooting south and two shooting

back to the east, down toward the tail. That machine gun fire was coming out and it was keeping anybody from moving on down toward the tail of the island. So we had the destroyer Ringgold fire at it and that skipper was obviously a brave guy. He came in until he was almost on the reef. So he was firing five-inch guns, direct fire, at a range of not more than 1,200 yards. All it was doing was just blowing sand around, and shell fragments were coming right back over us, you know. We'd gotten in the best holes we could and we saw that wasn't going to accomplish anything. The platoon leader of the engineer platoon that was attached to Crow's battalion was a guy named Alexander Bonnyman, and he had been a prospector in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado, a real old-time prospector. He was about eight or ten years older than most of us. All of this shooting exposed some metal ventilating shafts, and we had no idea what was in this thing. Turned out it was a power plant. Anyway, he got the notion of dropping explosives down those ventilator shafts. So he went back and told Crow, and so Crow liked the idea and he turned to his regimental exec, whose name was Chamberlain, and said, "You and Bonnyman and (unclear), who was the company commander of the infantry company, and Elrod get together and come up with a plan." So the deal was, I was going to cover the exit from the south side and then the

infantry company was going to cover the one that was to the east, and Bonnyman and two or three of his guys tied five or six sticks of dynamite together with a short fuse, and they were going to drop them down these ventilator shafts. Well, as soon as they started doing that, the Japs started running out both ways, and that's when we racked up over seventy coming out of the south.

Mr. Simmons: You fired canister?

Mr. Elrod: They counted up later, after I left. Between the two of us we killed 156 of them.

Mr. Simmons: You were firing canister?

Mr. Elrod: We were firing canister.

Mr. Simmons: What range were you at?

Mr. Elrod: I would say most of it was fifty to seventy yards. Not a soul escaped, and Bonnyman was killed there, on top. See, he could be seen from everywhere. I don't know whether the other Marines on top were killed or not, but he was given the Congressional Medal.

Mr. Simmons: Wow!

Mr. Elrod: And then on the side where the infantry was, they had two of his engineers with flame throwers and they were alternating napalm out of them, and then the guys were shooting rifles and machine guns, too. So there were just two strings of dead bodies strung

out there. During the night of--the second night--there was a pretty good-sized group attack against us. Crow said in his after action report that two of my guns stopped somewhere between two and three hundred of them. I think it's probably more like a hundred or two hundred. We didn't kill all of them but we stopped them.

Mr. Simmons: How close did they get to you?

Mr. Elrod: Some of them within fifteen, twenty yards. I had decided back in Guadalcanal that my gunners were going to properly serve their weapon. They had to not be worried about some guy getting close to them and bayoneting them or grenading them. So I asked for a Browning Automatic Rifle for each squad and regiment said they just didn't have any. So I took a couple of guys and wandered around, and every time we could see a B-A-R that wasn't closely guard, we absconded with it. (Mr. Simmons laughs). And I got four of them.

Mr. Simmons: You do what you had to do.

Mr. Elrod: So that was just one of the little things.

Mr. Simmons: Yeah.

Mr. Elrod: We called that cumshaw.

Mr. Simmons: Were you getting resupplied with ammunition or did you pretty much (unclear)?

Mr. Elrod: I had enough ammunition to last me. I think I went back one time for more canister. We were getting stuff ashore, but it was coming in in a very uncontrolled way. The thing we needed most was water, but I hated to send anybody anywhere because it was extremely dangerous to be running around. What I instructed them to do is take no more than five steps and then hit the deck, and then roll one way or the other and when they got up, go at a diagonal direction; don't go the same pattern. Mix it up. So if somebody was waiting for him to get up and run and think he was going to go this way, he'd go that way. You know, it was some way to try to save lives.

Mr. Simmons: You said you lost some men there; about how many? What was your casualty figure?

Mr. Elrod: I would say probably ten or twelve; probably somewhere about twenty percent. I had all that written down in my notebook; I just don't remember the exact number.

Mr. Simmons: Well, it's understandable.

Mr. Elrod: I came out of it better than some, and I guess some of that's just luck.

Mr. Simmons: Well, and some of it's leadership, too.

Mr. Elrod: Well, I never told my Marines; I showed 'em. And I never sent 'em; I took 'em. I had no training other than recruit boot camp

until after I'd been selected for major. When I tell people that now (laughs).

Mr. Simmons: Well, some people are natural and they know what to do, and it seemed like (unclear).

Mr. Elrod: My life and growing up and having to look after things by myself probably fitted me better for that sort of thing than most.

Mr. Simmons: I think that's true. The farm boys learned to do--not just farm boys, but guys that had to do it on their own and had a sense of right and wrong, too.

Mr. Elrod: Well, you know, when I was growing up, the expression teenager hadn't been invented. You were either a young man or a young woman and you were expected to do that part of whatever a man or a woman did that your strength would permit.

Mr. Simmons: Well, okay, we need to move along here I guess. We're going to eat up the rest of your afternoon. We're going into the third day, the last day, of Tarawa.

Mr. Elrod: Well, once that machine gun fire--well, let me finish the story about it. When everything, when the people stopped running out, I was deeply curious about it. I crawled up there myself, and what it was, was a door, but they had upright logs. They were tapered so when the fill that went around the place was like that--it was like a narrow channel right out from that door and there were still two Japs on the machine gun. There was a crack

in the logs about like that, and I could see, so I killed those two with my pistol, and then I got two Marines to come up because I didn't know if there were more people inside or not. Then I went back where they were working on the airfield and got one of the armored dozers to come up there and actually push sand and logs and stuff and bury that door. Then this opened it up so that Bill Jones' Sixth Marines could come up without enfilading fire that was going across. The north side, you know, a man or two could get by but not even a squad could go behind that seawall. With that airfield, it was just as bare as before, and there was some Marine pilot landed right there with the dozers and everything going. I never did know, to this day, whether he had something wrong with his plane or whether he was just some guy wanted to be the first guy to land on that field. You know, some of those pilots are like that. When things calmed down, Crow took us over to the next island. We waded over there, and we were able to take a shower and get clean clothes, and they had a hot meal for us. They had put an artillery unit over there on that island; this was the first time that we ever had our own artillery firing at us. Any overs were going to hit us! We spent a night there and then went right back aboard ship, the same ships that we came on. In fact, I went into the same bunk that I had gotten before.

Mr. Simmons: Where did you go from there?

Mr. Elrod: To the big island of Hawaii.

Mr. Simmons: That must have been nice.

Mr. Elrod: Yeah, well, to us this was like going to civilization.

Mr. Simmons: Sure.

Mr. Elrod: The heir to the Parker Ranch, his name wasn't Parker but he was descended from one of the daughters. He was the last of the line, and he had been born there in Hawaii but he liked Hollywood and so on, and he was some kind of small-time actor. He had volunteered to let us have the camp up on Mauna Kea, up on the Parker Ranch, and he allowed us to use enough of the ranch that we could shoot any gun that we had. When we landed, we landed at Hilo, and then we had to go overland to get over to the other side of the island where the camp was going to be. They called it Camp Tarawa. When we landed there, old Julian Smith knew that here we were with no blankets or anything. We were going to be up 4,000 feet, and this is December. It's cold! There's snow on the top of Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa. There was a three-star general, Richardson, that was Army Command, and General Smith knew that he had a warehouse that had blankets. He wanted two blankets, and General Richardson said that this was there for an emergency. General Smith said, "I think this is an emergency. I'm going to



get a tank and come and if those doors are not open, I will unlock them.” They were open when he came back. Camp Tarawa consists of piles of folded tents that have been dumped out of the back of trucks. So we put it together and we’re up about 4,000 feet and it’s cold up there, you know, not frigid but you could walk about three or four miles and be down at the beach and swim. We had all the land we wanted to train in. There was just scads of room to train. We could shoot anything we wanted to shoot. One day we were putting on a demonstration with a new regimental commander and this same Little Beaver was the gunner; he had been promoted to corporal. On Tarawa he had taken a bullet in his helmet, just over his left eye. Apparently it hit at a little bit of an angle and it went around just scraping the skin, made a red mark around his head and exited just back behind his back, so he got a new helmet liner but he kept that one. He had done some good shooting and so the regimental commander was complimenting him, and he looked at his helmet and said, “Well, that was close, wasn’t it?” And he looked kind of strange and he said, “Colonel, close don’t count.” So we picked up training but we totally ignored the Army. You know, they had blackout, and we wouldn’t blackout. We’d been overseas almost two years then, some of us, and two campaigns under our belts. We felt pretty salty, and we

wouldn't salute the Army. When we first got there, and meantime, Crow's been transferred and I have a new commander. He has a battalion now and he's going to--well, it's the same battalion but we have a different commander in the regimental weapons company. His name was Rich and some Army MP had seen a jeep driving without blackout; he was driving with regular headlights. And he came, and Rich turned to the first sergeant; he said, "First sergeant, throw this man out of the camp." So he had a clerk grab an arm and a leg and another clerk grab an arm and a leg and they went one-two-three and threw this Army MP out in the street, and we had no more trouble with the Army. (Laughs). We were there approximately nine months. Actually, if you've had a hard fight and lost people, by the time you get everybody back going and get replacements and get them properly trained, it takes just about that long. So we loaded out and we were going to spend a night, or maybe it was two nights, in Pearl Harbor. The first night we were there, the LST that had all of our mortar ammunition on it blew up. So we had to wait for them to fly more ammunition out from the states, so we wound up being there five days. I discovered that I could join the Pearl Harbor Navy Officers' Club for five dollars, and I would get two bottles of liquor. So I joined the club five times (laughs). (Unclear) boy this outfit's

full of Elrods (both laugh). Anyway, I stashed these around and in the meantime, I've been promoted to captain. I was promoted to captain on the first of January. I don't know if I was promoted out of line or not but--

Mr. Simmons: Now this is '44.

Mr. Elrod: What?

Mr. Simmons: 1944.

Mr. Elrod: Yeah.

Mr. Simmons: Okay.

Mr. Elrod: So, they had now put in four 75-millimeter halftracks in the regimental weapons company. They still had the three platoons of .37s, and this billet for the four halftracks is a captain's billet and I had a lieutenant exec. So it's actually just about like a battery of artillery because I had a half with a 75 millimeter gun on it. Then I had a pencil mount in the center of the back with a .50 caliber, and then a .30 caliber on each side. So you can imagine how much firepower we had with that. The regimental commander gave me my orders: go where you can do the most good. So when we left out of Honolulu, out of Pearl Harbor, Newsweek magazine had come out and on the front it showed Saipan with a red arrow pointing to it. This really pissed all of us because, you know, maybe the Japs knew we were coming

there anyway but I don't know how they would've known, and I don't know how--

Mr. Simmons: How could they get away with that?

Mr. Elrod: I don't know, but it really made everybody angry.

Mr. Simmons: I can imagine! I mean that's treason!

Mr. Elrod: Well, you can understand why I've learned to hate the press. And if we have time at the end, I'll tell you where it all started. But anyway, it was a long haul. We went by Kwajalein and Eniwetok, and that's where we picked up all of the support ships. I've later learned there were 800 ships in that group. All I know was I could see ships, the ocean covered with ships in all directions. We didn't get to Saipan until the 15<sup>th</sup> of June, and that's when we landed. Again, I landed at the same beach where Crow landed but I'm not attached to him anymore.

Mr. Simmons: What's Crow doing at this time?

Mr. Elrod: He's a battalion commander.

Mr. Simmons: Okay.

Mr. Elrod: He was wounded the first day, very badly. But I went from first one battalion, then the other, just where I thought I could do the most good. This is an entirely different kind of an operation. The Japs are dug into caves and hillsides; I mean, really dug in. You just have to dig 'em out one at a time. A lot of those places had two entrances. With the 75-millimeter gun and the size shell

that it had, I could shoot right in those openings, and a lot of times cave them in, but not always. Some of that rock is pretty hard. But it was very, very good and I worked right with the infantry. They had one spotted, and sometimes we spotted them on our own.

Mr. Simmons: Have you ever worked with a 75-millimeter before that or is it your first time?

Mr. Elrod: That was the first time. Now at A&M, I happened to be in the "B" Battery, Field Artillery, and we had the old 75s still on the wheels that they had in World War I, but this gun has been taken off now and it's just the gun part. I could traverse it a pretty good direction, but we had a connection between the gunner and the driver, so if he needed to turn a little bit to let him get the gun far enough around he could. They were pretty well armored. They could turn any bullet or shell fragment up to, I expect a .50 caliber armor-piercing wouldn't come through it. They were open in the back, so they weren't (unclear) like a tank, (unclear, both speaking together) but it was a very formidable weapon, and I could do a lot of good there. Mainly we were just cave hunting. The initial landing part, there was lots of artillery landing in the area, but it was nowhere near as bad as Tarawa. As a matter of fact, four years ago I went back to Saipan on a military historical tour group. There's still tanks

and so forth that were hit and destroyed in the water; you can still see them. It was not as brutal as the landing at Tarawa.

Mr. Simmons: Well, I don't think anything (unclear)--

Mr. Elrod: My biggest problem is there were lots of lakes and sandy spots along, and I had a hard time finding ways to get the halftracks through. We had to be real careful with the rear axle because it was built on a light truck frame, and that thing was heavy. If you hit the accelerator too hard, you'd break an axle. We did break an axle on one, so I left a couple of men there and by this time, we really have the supply situation on the beach organized. The third day, they were back. They had gotten the axle replaced. It was a big impression. They had taken all of the regimental and battalion sergeants and put them in a triage center down on the beach, and we had two water distillation plants down there. I don't know, along some time in the first week or so, one of those Japanese raid planes at night destroyed one of the desalinization plants, so we had water problems the whole time I was on Saipan. They were just distilling it enough to make it drinkable, so it was still--it tasted bad but you could drink it; it'd keep and it'd keep you alive. The Fourth Marines, the Fourth Marine Division on the right and the Second Marine Division on the left, when the Fourth was forced to cut straight across the island and then turn south and clean up that part, and

that's where the landing field was that the Japanese had, then the Second Division was supposed to attack until they were aligned with Mount Tapochau, and then they were to turn and head to the north, and the Army division was going to come in and take the side on the right of Mount Tapochau. I was mainly cave hunting and so on the whole time that I was there.

Mr. Simmons: Were you being called in; I mean the guys up on the front line would say, hey we've got a cave up here, let's give them the (unclear)?

Mr. Elrod: Yeah, see I stayed real close to the front, and I kept real close contact with the battalion commanders and the company commanders.

Mr. Simmons: Okay. So you had good radio sets this time?

Mr. Elrod: Yeah, that and I did a lot of personal liaison with them.

Mr. Simmons: Yeah, so you had runners who--

Mr. Elrod: Yeah, and things were much more controlled. Remember, this is the third time. We're getting to be pretty good soldiers (unclear). In fact, all of the officers by that time, and most of the squad leaders, were long-time trained, you know? We were probably about as hardened a unit as you will ever be able to get. You know, you had to watch about the Japanese. You could shoot at them and they'd pull the guns back inside. When you stopped and tried to move, they'd move the guns back again.

Well, Puller came up with a simple way; he said you solved it with a corkscrew and the blowtorch. The corkscrew was artillery fire like mine, or satchel charges, and the blowtorch was either the flame throwing tanks or the individual flame throwers.

Mr. Simmons: Was it a flame throwing tank, the first--?

Mr. Elrod: That was the first time we had them, and boy, those things could put out the fire. They could creep up a whole lot closer than you could any other way. It was just a steady grind. There were two kinds of civilians there. This was the first time we had fought where there were civilians. They had the Chamorros and then they had the Japanese. The prison camps or civilian camps, whatever you wanted to call them, separated the Chamorros from the Japanese. The Chamorros were friendly but the Japanese civilians were not. There was one case where I came up on quite a group; they were mostly women and children, but there was an old man--

Mr. Simmons: Chamorros?

Mr. Elrod: Yeah, they were in the Polynesian--it started with a C, Chamorro, but they looked a lot like Hawaiians or the Tahitians or the Maoris. They're all Polynesian. I guess these people were scared and didn't have any idea what to do, and we didn't have anybody with us that spoke the language. This one old man suddenly started speaking Spanish and I had a Hispanic



Marine and it turns out the old guy was there when the Spaniards had it before World War II--I mean before World War I--and as a teenager schoolboy, he'd been forced to learn Spanish. So we were able to tell them, just go right on through, and there'll be somebody there to show you what to do and so on. By the time he got to us, he was getting into a pretty safe area. There was one night, it was literally pouring down rain, and just as dark as pitch, and when I would be in my hole at night, I always stayed either lying on my back or in a moderately sitting position. I would stick my knife in the bank so when my elbow and my hip, the knife would be right there, the grasp. I had traded four Japanese teeth to an aviator for a shoulder holster for my .45, so I could keep it loaded and cocked on safe. Sometime during the night, the first sergeant yelled, "Captain, I've got one in the hole with me." Well, I couldn't see his hole and I jumped out too quick; I didn't remember to get my knife. When I got over there, he said, "Don't shoot in here; I'm under this guy." I was feeling around and I found his entrenching tool and I reached down and put my hand under the Jap's forehead and smacked him in the back of the head with this entrenching tool. You know, when the skull breaks up, it's like safety glass. It breaks up in little pieces and the back of his head felt just like marbles. By this time there are a couple of Marines there and they stick

him a few times with knives. We found out the next morning that what had happened, he was wandering around and he stepped in the hole and apparently hadn't buckled the chin strap, so his helmet had, when he went in his helmet went up, and his rifle with his fixed bayonet was up there, but he had fallen and the sergeant had just grasped him like that. We never did know what he was up to. Anyway, that's the closest I ever came to hand-to-hand combat.

Mr. Simmons: Well that is hand-to-hand combat. (Mr. Elrod laughs). I mean you've got ahold of the guy whether he's still alive, it's--

Mr. Elrod: The first sergeant, my birthday was the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June, and let's see, we had landed there on the 15<sup>th</sup>, and again it was raining and the only place I could find that was anywhere near dry was a little shed and a pile of cow manure that the Japs had been saving up to spread on the field. So I was sitting on that eating a C Ration and the first sergeant came riding up on a Japanese bicycle with a yellow silk kimono around his shoulders. They all sang "Happy Birthday," and he said, "I have a letter for you." There had been a mail call, and I had written a letter between the time I left the big island and we got to Pearl. I had heard that the gal that I had been dating, the one that was the pilot, had been at Muleshoe, and I decided I'd reconnect with her. She had gotten my letter and she had written me. Anyway, when we were

moving up toward Tapochau, before we got there, the Fourth Marines had gotten all the way across the island and the Army had moved in. They were down in this valley and that division commander wasn't very aggressive. We kept moving ahead until our battalion commander on the right had a whole company strung back to the rear to maintain contact. What they kept doing was shooting artillery, and we could look down there and see there wasn't anything holding them up. And that's when "Howling Mad" Smith relieved the Army general. When they got the Brigadier in, he realized, hey, this guy is going to have my case if I don't move, so things got better. But there's still real hard feelings between the Army and Marines over that.

Mr. Simmons: That happened on Okinawa; they (unclear, both speaking together).

Mr. Elrod: Even worse.

Mr. Simmons: Yeah, (laughing) they didn't want the Marines in charge of the Army (unclear).

Mr. Elrod: Anyway, as the island began to get narrower, it was decided that the Army was going to do the final cleanup, and so the right flank battalion that I was with happened to be our First Battalion, Eighth Marines. We made a ninety degree turn and were attacking down from Tapochau toward Garapan. In other words, we were approaching Garapan like this; that was the

biggest city on Saipan. At about 9:00 in the morning, one of my halftracks had just knocked out a machine gun emplacement and an artillery round landed up in front of me. Now that was Japanese artillery. Well, I knew there would be at least three more, you know, battery one round or maybe more than that. I half turned and started to go in this hole and the second round hit behind me at seven o'clock, just six or eight yards behind me and knocked me probably from here to the wall. I half saw the hole that I was going into, and a Marine had gotten in there and it took his head off right even with his eyes. Immediately I lost sensation of this leg, so I thought my leg was blown off, because I could see quite a bit of blood. I had my guys carry two canteens, so these shell fragments that went in my spine had ruptured one of the canteens. So a lot of what looked like blood to me was water mixed with blood. While I was trying to figure out how to get a tourniquet on my stump, which wasn't a stump, a corpsman got to me. They split my clothes, stripped me down and you know, I had shell fragments all over me. They patched me up and he must have given me a little shot of morphine, because from that time on, I was kind of in and out. I had to be carried on a stretcher a ways before we could get to where there was a jeep that was going to take me back to that hospital on the beach. They put me down crossways, but while they were

carrying me I heard one of the stretcher bearers say, “This son of a bitch is really heavy.” (Chuckles). When I got down, I don’t remember getting to the hospital but I remember waking up, and it turned out that our regimental surgeon was the one that worked on me, and he was from a hospital in Lubbock. With me growing up in Muleshoe, we got to be good buddies. He said, “Well, you’re wounded so badly that you’re going to have to be taken off the island. Now, tell people to keep their knives out of your back.” So they had an LCM, that’s the next biggest boat up, that’s one that can take a tank in. They had the whole bottom of this covered with us on stretchers. I’m still on my belly, stark naked, but I wouldn’t let them move me without my pistol; I kept it with me. I looked at the Marine next to me and he’s beginning to turn blue. I realized he’s choking, and I reached over with my hand, and his tongue had fallen--he was unconscious--his tongue had fallen back in his throat and I just reached a finger in and pulled his tongue up and was holding it, and his color came back. So I did that, and just as we got out to the hospital ship, a Japanese air raid came up, and the ship took off, and we bounced around out there for quite some time until the ship came back. I told--they were letting metal baskets down taking people on--I told them to watch out about that guy. I was on the hospital ship seven or eight days and we went down to the

Navy equivalent of a MASH on Banika in the Russell Islands. That was actually about ninety miles--the Russells are a part of the Solomon Islands, and it was a pretty decent thing. There were probably twenty or so of us in this one little Quonset hut and I was the senior one there. After a few days, I'm bedfast; after a few days some Marine lieutenant colonel came over and he was from the First Division. They were on the next island over, which was Pavuvu, but apparently it was a marsh. Whoever picked it, picked it from the air, and apparently they had a real messy situation--rotting coconuts and all kinds of things. But anyway, he said he was the division intelligence officer and I was the senior casualty there. He was trying to find out what we'd found at Saipan, because they were planning their next operation, which happened to be Pavuvu. I told him about the way the Japs were digging in and everything, and he talked to me probably an hour or so. He said, "Well, what do you drink?" And I said, "Well, I'll drink most anything, but if I had my preference, it would be scotch." Well, I thought that was the end of it. The next day he came back and he had a bottle with about that much scotch in it; he said, "That is every drop of scotch there is in the First Marine Division." (Both laugh). I don't know how long I was there in that hospital, but you know, they were bathing me in the bed and all that kind of stuff. One

night, well one day rather, some funny thing happened. Turns out that it was a Marine lieutenant, a pilot--and we had gotten the Corsair airplanes, and it seemed that, you know, the wings would fold up--and it seems he got ready to take off and he had forgotten to unfold his wings. He put the throttle full on and the tower is trying to stop him, but he's not paying attention to that. He's throwing every bit of throttle he can to that thing and he manages, just on the power of the engine, to get it up high enough to hit the top of the coconut trees.

Mr. Simmons: Was he drinking or something? I mean you can't (unclear) those wings come up over the cockpit.

Mr. Elrod: He was just young and inexperienced--

Mr. Simmons: Oh, good grief.

Mr. Elrod: --and he was trying to figure out why I can't get this thing in the air, and not listening to the radio. Boy, we gave him a hard time after that. Then one night, there was a lot of commotion. The next morning, there's a woman in the bed in there. It turns out she's a Russian sailor, and she's complaining that she's been raped, and these two, I guess because this was an officer's place, the two nurses that were looking after us were regular Navy, and they were Navy lieutenants, so they had been in the Navy awhile. They were pretty hard-crusted gals, and they knew all the ins and outs of servicemen. One of them told me, she said,

“I think the problem was she just didn’t get paid.” Anyway, one night I went to sleep there and when I woke up the next day, I was in a big hospital over on Guadalcanal. So they must have knocked me out because I don’t know whether I went by boat or by plane or how I got there. But see, by this time, Guadalcanal was a big resupply point and it’s a much bigger hospital, much nicer facilities. I was there for quite some time. I finally got to where, with some help from a corpsman, I could go into the head and shave and take a shower and use the commode and so on. One morning I’m in there shaving and next to me is a civilian in his underwear; it was Bob Hope. He had one of his tour groups there, and so I chatted with him, you for know, ten or fifteen minutes. What a gracious man! He was being so complimentary about what we were doing and everything. I wasn’t able to go hear the show, but the morning after, Hope and Colonna and a couple of the gals, Frances Langford and another one, they came in with their short pants and everything and kicking up their legs and singing, and Hope and Colonna doing one of their things, you know. When that ended, these two gals went around the beds and gave each one of us a kiss. Anyway, I’ve always had a soft spot for Bob Hope, ever since.

Mr. Simmons: He’s quite a man.



Mr. Elrod: Anyway, I was there until some time in October. By then, I can walk a little bit but not a whole lot, but I could walk some. They were trying to figure out--they knew I had quite a while yet to recover, and they were trying to figure out a way to get it back to the states. Mostly the ones they were flying back were the guys that were still stretcher cases. They were using these jeep carriers to ferry planes out; they didn't have refueling then, so they were using those jeep carriers to ferry out all the replacement planes. Then they were going back mostly empty, so they put a bunch of us that were more or less ambulatory casualties on there and we were able to get up and eat with the officers in the officers' mess and so on. So it was some time around the end of October that I landed at Oxnard, up above Los Angeles. They had ambulances waiting there for us and they took me down to a hospital in Long Beach. So, let's see, that's one, two, three, four, that's the fifth hospital that I've been in, and I was there for a good long while. By the time--

Mr. Simmons: Well now, Camp Pendleton was open by then and we're--

Mr. Elrod: Yeah, see they had torn Elliott down and they had built Camp Pendleton. But see, I had never seen it.

Mr. Simmons: Okay, but you were not there. You were south of LA but you were not in Pendleton. The hospital you were in--

Mr. Elrod: That was in San Diego.

Mr. Simmons: Oh, in San Diego?

Mr. Elrod: No, see I'm in Long Beach--I missed it--I'm in the hospital in Long Beach.

Mr. Simmons: I'm sorry; it's Long Beach, which is (unclear).

Mr. Elrod: The Navy then came out, with a plan where, if there was a Navy hospital near your home, you could go to that nearest hospital. My mother lived in San Diego, so I got transferred to the Navy hospital in San Diego, and it's right in town. It turns out that Crow is in the same hospital, but on the floor above me. So somebody from Newsweek magazine comes to him and wants to interview him, and he sends them down to me. And I have the clipping from that magazine and it's almost verbatim what I told the guy. I have that in my scrapbook. I was there until sometime around the first week in December, and that's when I--they wanted to retire me--but the so-called profile board was four Navy doctors, who were reserves, and a reserve Marine major. I'm a regular officer; according to one of the commandants, there were only either six or eight field commission people who were given a regular commission during the war instead of a reserve commission. I was a regular and I remembered all the problems they had after World War I, and I wanted to stay in the Marine Corps, and I talked them into it. They said, well if you can pass the physical after a year, we'll

do it. So I finally was released from the hospital sometime probably around the last, seventh, eighth or ninth of December. By this time, the Air Force has closed their base at Fort Stockton. My wife is now in Galveston monitoring contracts between the Navy and the Galveston shipyards. So the deal was, I was going to try to come to see her. You know, they hadn't made any new cars since, I guess the last ones were '41, but I found a pretty good old Mercury coupe. The reason they had the gasoline ration then was to save rubber. They didn't have synthetic rubber and the Japs had captured all the rubber sources. So when I went to get my gas ration, it wasn't very much, and I was complaining about it and this young girl said, "Well, there's a war on, you know." And here I'm standing there in my uniform and I said, "I'll be damned. I wondered what all that commotion was about." (Both laugh). Anyway, you could get extra gasoline to drive you from where you were living to where your duty station was. So I had gotten my orders and I was going to be teaching Naval gunfire at the Gunfire Support School there by Coronado, but I had 30 days leave. Here I have over four years in the Marine Corps, and I've had a total of fifteen days leave. So I'm going to go to Galveston. Well, there's no point in trying to fly there because the military is using that. The buses and the trains are all--and the carrier

Bunker Hill had been hit by a kamikaze at Okinawa and had limped into Bremerton. They had taken those experienced pilots off, and some of them were being sent to Pensacola to be flight instructors. So I was sitting at the bar in the Navy club at North Island, and this young Navy officer was there and I started talking to him. I don't know--he was being ordered to Pensacola--and you could get gas enough to take you from where you were to where your next duty station was going to be. So he had enough gas to get from San Diego to Pensacola, and somehow we got on to where he was from, and he was from Sudan, and I said, "Petey, I'll tell you what I'll do. You give me your gas ration and I'll drive you to your front door," because he was getting leave to see his folks. So we did that. My one Elrod uncle that I liked was ranching at Ozona and--not at Ozona but, oh, what's the town right by Midland?

Mr. Simmons: Odessa?

Mr. Elrod: Odessa, yeah. That's the one thing I have trouble with, names. Odessa. I know it as well as anything, but--he was in Odessa and so I was going to spend the night with him, and he said, "Spend another night, because the Chamber of Commerce is meeting tomorrow and I want you to go and talk to them." So I agreed. I don't suppose they had ever seen a Marine officer in Odessa, certainly not one just back from the war. So when it

was over they were all, you know, patting me on the back and everything and wanted to know if there was anything that they could do for me. Well, I had had five flats getting (unclear). The tires were rotten. And I said, "I sure could use four new tires." They had the emergency meeting of the ration board right there; within an hour I had four brand new tires on the car (both laugh). So anyway, I got on down to meet my wife; we hadn't seen each other in five and a half years, and so the second night, I asked her to marry me. And she said, "Okay, but it's going to take a while." I said, "Well, we've got nine days. Use as much as you need." So we pulled it off and so then we drove back out to San Diego. I taught there in the Naval Gunfire School. They were training Naval officers to work with Army and so on in the invasion of Japan. After they dropped the bomb and the war ended, they didn't need that so they shut the school down. So my orders then were to go to Cuba and so we drove across to-- she was born in southern Virginia--and we drove across there and I sold my car. We got on a ship in New York and went to Cuba, but we went by the way of Bermuda and Puerto Rico, and then in. I was C.O. of the guard company in Cuba. I was responsible for security of the base.

Mr. Simmons: At Guantanamo?

Mr. Elrod: At Guantanamo, yeah.

Mr. Simmons: Wow. Well, that's a great way to end the war, getting married and signing up to a career.

Mr. Elrod: Yeah. Anyway, that is where the book is ended. I had some real interesting times after that in the Marine Corps, but--

Mr. Simmons: And I want to get an interview with you, and we can do telephone interviews.

Mr. Elrod: Okay.

Mr. Simmons: And I would love to get your telephone number so we can do it, but the museum closed twenty minutes ago, so I want to say that, on behalf of the museum, we respect what you did and we want to give you our appreciation for the time you put in the Marine Corps and it means a lot to us for you to be able to share your stories with us. And so, thank you very much for your service, sir.

Mr. Elrod: I'm just glad my memory is good.

Mr. Simmons: I'm glad that it is, too. For that I will stop it right here.

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