

Earl McWilliams Oral History Interview

MARK CUNNINGHAM: This is Mark Cunningham. Today is August 29, 2014. I am interviewing Mr. Earl McWilliams. The interview is taking place at Waldenbrooke Estates in Bryan, Texas. This interview is in support of the Nimitz Education and Research Center, archives for the Museum -- for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information related to this site. OK, Mr. McWilliams, the first thing I want to do is say thank you for doing the interview, but more important, thank you for your service to your country.

EARL MCWILLIAMS: You're quite welcome.

MC: OK. Now, tell me when you were born. What's your birthday?

EM: I was born on October the 19th, 1919, in Atlanta, Texas.

MC: Nineteen-nineteen. So that makes you 90...

EM: I'll be 95 this year.

MC: Ninety-five this year. You don't look 95.

EM: (laughs)

MC: You look like a pretty spry 95-year-old gentleman. OK, and where were you born?

EM: I was born in Atlanta, Texas.

MC: Atlanta, Texas.

EM: Atlanta, 23 miles south of Texarkana.

MC: Wow. Wow, I didn't know there was an Atlanta, Texas.

EM: Deep east Texas.

MC: OK.

EM: Yeah.

MC: And what were your parents' name? What's your mother and father --

EM: My mother's name was Lucy Eleanor McWilliams. My daddy was Joseph Benjamin. He was known as just "Joe."

MC: OK. And what'd they do? What'd he do?

EM: My daddy was a carpenter.

MC: OK. And now, in your early life, what were you doing before the war?

EM: I was a Houston firefighter, 35 years.

MC: OK, now you were in the fire department before the war started?

EM: Yes, sir.

MC: You finished high school and all that stuff?

EM: Yes, sir.

MC: OK. How long had you been at the fire department?

EM: I went to work with the fire department in August, 1943, and I was inducted into the service October 12, 1944.

MC: OK, so you were drafted into the US Army.

EM: Yes, sir, from Bryan, Texas. We had a small draft board.

MC: OK. Now tell me, where did you take your boot camp?

EM: I took my boot camp at Camp Hood. It's now called Fort Hood, Texas, at Killeen.

MC: Fort Hood, Texas. OK.

EM: Yeah.

MC: All right. And, how did you react to all that? What was your first impression [of that?]

EM: Well, my first impression was: As we left Fort Sam Houston, which was [the?] induction center, and they closed all the blinds and closed -- the windows were all painted and everything, and I thought we was going [for a?] long way, and so I went to sleep. When the train pulled out of Fort Sam and I woke up, it was stopping, and I said -- I stood it as long as I could, and I peeped out the window, and there's what I saw: Camp Hood, Texas.

MC: Wow.

EM: (laughs)

MC: Wow. Now what time of year was this? When did you --

EM: This was in October the...

MC: Forty-three?

EM: Forty-three.

MC: Forty-three.

EM: Yeah.

MC: OK. Right about the middle of the war.

EM: Yes, sir. I was married with two children.

MC: OK.

EM: Yeah.

MC: That's kind of unusual in -- for by that time, they were drafting married guys, weren't they?

EM: Well, they were, because I was in a small draft board and they had to fill a quota, and so they took me. I could have had a deferment, but I didn't choose to have one. The fire department would've got me one.

MC: OK, I'm going to pause --

(break in audio)

MC: OK, tell me a little bit about boot camp. What are your memories?

EM: Boot camp, it was real interesting. It was cold weather. I went through in November, December, and January, I believe it was.

MC: Yeah. And it can be chilly that time of year.

EM: In Camp Hood, it could be. But anyway, we fell out early -- didn't bother me because I was an early riser anyway -- but we marched out every morning to the drill field, or whichever part we was going to. It was about 15 miles over to north Camp Hood, and we walked over that way many a time. We'd go out in the morning and we'd walk, say, 10

miles, and we'd have an hour's map reading, and come back and be sleep, and sometime they would be pretty nice days. We had a lot of billy goat stew, and (laughs) I did --

MC: What's billy goat stew?

EM: That's about all they raise up in that part of Texas, is goats.

MC: Oh, you're not being funny. I mean, that was real billy goat stew. (laughs)

EM: Yeah, and I didn't even go to mess hall on Friday because I didn't eat fish of any kind, and any kind of seafood, and so I just made it on something I'd bought out of the PX. And my wife came over every weekend, and we had a standing reservation at the hotel in Temple, and I was -- the first sergeant made arrangements to let me off. I'd done all my KP and everything during the week so I could have Saturday and Sunday off, and my wife came over. She didn't bring the kids. She lived in -- she went back to live with her parents in Bryan, Texas, because she only got \$100 a month and that wouldn't feed her and two kids. And so my father-in-law told me when I left, he said, "Earl, I'll take care of Wilma and the kids. You just come back home." And I said, "I'll be back."

MC: That was a big relief to you, too.

EM: It really was. It removed a big burden. Yeah,
(inaudible).

MC: Yeah. Well that's great. OK, after boot camp, what then?

EM: OK, we were cut short. We were cut from 16 to 12 weeks. They had a breakthrough over in Europe, and they took the class ahead of us and... In fact, they took two classes, and the first class that left before we left Camp Hood, some of those men were back in McCloskey General, missing legs and arms. It wasn't very much encouragement. We thought we were going to Europe, but otherwise, but anyway, they shipped us out. We left Camp Hood one night about, oh, 1:30, 2:00 in the morning, and we headed for Los Angeles, and then to Fort Ord. We got into Los Angeles about four o'clock in the morning, and we walked around Los Angeles until eight o'clock, and we caught the daylight limiting.

MC: OK, so you only had 12...

EM: I had 12 weeks training.

MC: Twelve weeks of boot camp. You had nothing after that.

EM: Nothing after that --

MC: You went right, almost, straight into battle, or, [sent out?] overseas?

EM: We went to Fort Ord for outfitting for overseas shipment.

MC: That was where?

EM: At Fort Ord, California. And there, they made us run the infiltration course again. That's where they fix the sub -
- the machine guns over you -- they are about three and a half feet -- and you, on your stomach. And you go for about 100 yards, crawling, and you turn over, learn how to work your rifle [and?] the stomach, and that barbed wire crawl, with your rifle while you go under it. And then they made us go out and swim 250 yards in case the ship sunk, and you have to be 250 yards away from the ship, because when it goes down, it'll suck you in. And so, I didn't know how to swim very good but I jumped in, swam 250 yards. (laughs)

MC: Well, you're here.

EM: I'm here, and then --

MC: But you didn't -- fortunately, you didn't have to use that, did you?

EM: No, I sure didn't. They took us up to Camp Stoneman -- that's what they call a POE, port of embarkation. And we were there a few weeks, two weeks, waiting on a ship that, the ship had been torpedoed on the way back to get us, in the Pacific, and they had to repair a hole in the ship. And so we had to wait a couple of weeks for the ship, [and then they?] --

MC: Was it a troop ship or a (inaudible)?

EM: Yeah, it was USS *General John Pope*. It was a president liner in civilian service. It was 620 feet long; it could go 28 knots. And so, they loaded us. We were the last one to go aboard, a few weeks later. We loaded about 3:00 p.m. in the afternoon. The ship held 5,000 enlisted men, 2,000 officers, and a ship's company of 2,500. We only ate two meals a day. They served breakfast from 6:00 till 9:00, and at noon, some of the men in your compartment went down and got fresh fruit: apples, oranges, and stuff like that. We ate that then, and they served the evening meal from 3:00 till 6:00.

MC: Any trouble with the seasickness?

EM: A lot of the men did. The evening we pulled out, everybody run down and eat right quick. They had sauerkraut and weenies. (laughter)

MC: Oh boy. That's not good for a seasick guy.

EM: Anyway, you know that the Frisco Bay is the roughest continental waters touching the United States. But everybody eat right quick, and come up because they wanted to go under the Golden Gate Bridge and see Alcatraz. By the time we got past Alcatraz, they was throwing up. (laughs)

MC: Let me ask -- (inaudible) back up. OK, now you came directly out of boot camp...

EM: I had a nine-day delay in route.

MC: OK, now, were you in a certain group of guys?

EM: No, they -- if I would pay my way from Fort Hood, Camp Hood, to California, they'd give me an extra three days or four days in leave. And so I paid my own way from Camp Hood to California, and they reimbursed me later on, and I got to go home nine days in Bryan and be with my wife and kids before I went to California.

MC: All right. How did you get to California?

EM: We went back to -- there was another boy from Bryan in my outfit, and we went back to Camp Hood and caught the train.

MC: OK, so you rode the -- troop -- was it a troop train?

EM: It was kind of a troop train. It was full of troops, but it wasn't supposed to be, but anyway, it acted like it.

MC: Those trains weren't all that comfortable, were they?

EM: They weren't comfortable. But it all -- you had a lot of people; they were overcrowded. You stopped at every milk -- they called them milk stops, I believe, all along the way. It took us a long time to get to California.

(laughs)

MC: Also, that was a coal-fired train, too, right?

EM: Yeah.

MC: So you got a lot of smoke.

EM: Yeah, it did. And we'd stop in little towns, and everybody's gone into the -- they'd strip the town and then here they come back. (laughs) They'd buy anything loose. (laughs)

MC: Wow. OK, now, when did you actually -- after you got on the ship, where did you go?

EM: OK. We went to -- well, we was going to the Pacific. We didn't know where we were going. They didn't tell us, see. We were given overnight passes to San Francisco, but we couldn't tell anybody where we were going or anything. [We all?] had summer clothes -- we had a field [jacket?], was the heaviest thing we had -- and so everybody knew we was going to where it was hot. (laughs) But anyway, we boarded the ship and we started out. And the first time we stopped was [on an?] island in New Guinea. We stopped there waiting for some other ships to go on a convoy. And while we were there, stopped, waiting on a convoy -- there was four or five ships there around us -- a Japanese submarine stuck his nose up. And our captain sounded General Quarters and we went to sea. That thing squatted in the water just like it was a powerful thing, and we took off. He said, "I can outrun any Jap sub." And so we took off by ourselves --

MC: No escorts?

EM: No escorts, nothing. And so we sailed several more days. We was on board about 20-some odd days. And so... But anyway, we approached the island of Luzon in the Philippines, they told us, but we couldn't go into the port because it was better than 200 ships sunk in Manila Bay. So we went in, in little boats, a few men at a time, to the Fifth Replacement Depot in Manila. There was still snipers there and everything, you know -- the island hadn't been declared secure yet. So we stopped at -- we stayed two or three nights at the Fifth Replacement, and one evening about, oh, four o'clock, they loaded us up, so many men, and we went up in the mountains.

MC: On Luzon?

EM: On Luzon, yeah. This was the Caraballo Mountains, up in central Luzon.

MC: OK, now, what was your mission?

EM: We went up there and they dropped me off at this company. They said, "This is the third platoon of G Company, 27th Regiment of the 25th Division. You've been assigned to that. You're in the third platoon, in the third squad."

MC: That's the 25th Infantry.

EM: Yeah, 25th Infantry. [That'd be?] --

MC: Twenty-seventh Regiment.

EM: And 27th Regiment.

MC: And you said they called that the "Wolfhounds."

EM: Wolfhounds, yes, sir.

MC: OK, tell --

EM: They got that name --

MC: Tell me the origin of that name. Where did that come from?

EM: In World War I, the 27th Regiment, which was a regular overseas unit of the United States Army, they were in... oh, Siberia. Siberia. And they took the insignia of the Siberian wolfhound. That's their insignia. It's on this cap -- wherever that cap is, it's got -- I'm wearing. It's an overseas outfit, and they were at Pearl Harbor, at Schofield Barracks, when they bombed it. And most of the men were older. They had all had a lot of service, some of them. We mustered the first sergeant out while we were on Luzon; he had 42 years' service. And he was a hard guy. (laughs) But anyway, they dropped me off about, just [before?] dusk/dark.

MC: So you were a raw recruit, going into a combat operation.

EM: They had just completed -- they just finished the main encounter, or the Battle of Balete Pass. The Balete Pass was the blockade of the American forces to the northern end of the island of Luzon. From then on --

MC: They were trapped?

EM: Yeah. From then on, it would be plain, even land. But we'd come from -- they had come right straight through the mountains. I mean, if they wanted to cut a road down a mountain, the bulldozer would back up and he'd pull his cable up on top of the mountain and tie it to a tree, and he'd pull his self up backward. He'd cut the rope coming down. That's how steep they were. But anyway --

MC: Now, how did -- when you got into this new unit, you're the green guy, the --

EM: I'm a green guy.

MC: How were you treated?

EM: OK. Great. Somebody met me and said --

MC: Now were you in -- were these battle-hardened guys?

EM: Oh yeah. They had just come out of combat. Yeah, they had been up a long time.

MC: So one of the -- in some ways, that was probably an advantage to you.

EM: It was an advantage to me, and they'd fought at Guadalcanal with the Marines, the 27th had. And so, anyway, a guy that -- they dropped me off, and they -- the sergeant -- but they don't wear any insignias in combat. You can't tell a sergeant from a -- or a lieutenant from a buck private.

MC: OK, and you were a private at this point.

EM: I was a private. And so, he said, "Stay with this fellow named [Tuttle?]." Said, "Get in his hole for the night."

MC: OK, now hold on to that and back up. OK, when did you arrive on Luzon?

EM: In late April.

MC: Of 40...

EM: Forty-four -- forty-five.

MC: Late April of '45.

EM: Yeah. The 25th Division had hit Luzon on January the ninth, 1945, with three divisions. And they went ashore -- very little resistance, the men told me. And one section went south -- I believe that was the First Calvary Division -- they went south toward Manila. The 35th Infantry Regiment, which was part of the 25th, went straight across toward the summer capital of Luzon. It's called Baguio Hill. Baguio Hill.

MC: [You want to?] spell that?

EM: Baguio Hill. B-A-G --

MC: B-A-G-E-I-O [sic], or something like that?

EM: Yeah, Baguio. It's on the east coast of the island. And we went and turned straight up through the mountains, they told me.

MC: What type of fighting was this? [First?] order...?

EM: This was just little engagements and off and on skirmishes, until they got to the Balete Pass, and it was well-fortified for the -- by the Japs. But they'd had a lot of skirmishes with the Japs. One of their favorite -- I found out later on, one of their favorite tricks was, was to slip in behind the lines, set up a machine gun nest on a trail on a curve, and fire on one of the carrying parties every evening. They tried to get our men out that were wounded or dead, and they'd have carrying parties taking them out on these trails down, back down to what we call [our corps?], which was the headquarters place.

MC: OK, now, you told me, when I talked to you on the phone, you were a BAR man. How did you get to be a BAR man?

EM: OK, that night they put me in a foxhole with this boy named Eric Tuttle. He was assistant squad leader, and he told me, he'd said, "Now, it'll get dark after while," and said, "you look out there and you make sure you know where all them trees are." He said, "Now, we don't fire at night because they can see the muzzle -- it'll make a flash and the Japs will know where we are." He said, "You throw hand grenades, because they got monkeys up here, and they'll make you think they're Japs, and all. But you remember where them trees are, so if it looks like they're moving, that's them trees." And so he stayed up an hour and I

stayed an hour. He did an hour and I did an hour. I
threwed grenades all night long. I saw monkeys and
everything all -- I was scared to death.

MC: (laughs)

EM: But it finally got daylight. And they got old cootie birds
over there, that squall out and just scare the devil out of
you. And they got something called kunai grass -- it grows
up about three feet tall -- and it wasn't a very good
night. I stayed there because he stayed there; I figured
he stayed because I was there. (laughs)

MC: I'm sorry?

EM: I stayed because old Tuttle stayed that night and I think
he stayed because I did. But anyway, he was a good friend
and he had been in battle, and he was a lot of help to me.

MC: Did he survive the war?

EM: Yeah. He helped me a whole lot and I went to see him after
the war, he and his wife. They lived in North Carolina or
Virginia. But anyway, we would go on three-day patrols.
They were looking for injured Japs. The Japs just left
their injured and their wounded, and we were looking for
them because they wanted information. They said, "Bring in
some prisoners," because usually they didn't take
prisoners, the guy said, they just killed them. It was
awful. And so, anyway, we go on these three-day patrols.

Well the first time they took me -- they sent my platoon -- they made me lead scout. And when we got back from the three days, our platoon sergeant said, "We need another BAR man in Third Squad. Put that BAR on that long-headed, long-legged Texan. Let's slow him down." (laughs) He said, "He took us too fast on that last [jaunt?]."

MC: (laughs) Was he being funny, or was he --?

EM: Well, he was being both. You know, you've got to be careful. You know, you have a lead scout, then you have a BAR man. This is the way that you've been trained --

MC: You were moving too fast? He felt you were moving too fast?

EM: Yes, I didn't pay him -- I wasn't watching -- [a close watch on what?] he said, so... But we had a BAR -- we had a scout -- first scout, BAR man, second scout, BAR man, then the platoon sergeant, and then the men. That's the way we'd go up into the --

MC: OK, now what did you have to do to learn to use the BAR? Was there anything --

EM: Well, I had trained in basic, so --

MC: So you had already had the training, the BAR --
(overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

EM: Oh yeah, I knew all about the BAR. I couldn't take it
(inaudible).

MC: The BAR [guide?] is a key kind of platoon. Is that correct?

EM: It's one of the best weapons that we had to match firepower with the Jap light machine gun. Yeah. We carried magazines, so I carried 20 magazines --

MC: That's a lot of weight.

EM: Yeah, I had --

MC: How much does --

EM: The BAR weight 19 pounds.

MC: Now, how about the magazines, how many shells in those?

EM: They held 20 rounds in each magazine.

MC: And that's a fully automatic weapon, right?

EM: Yeah. I mean, it'll -- fff -- it's gone, 20 round. You can't hardly squeeze off one round, but I could; I learned how. Because I never hunted or anything, and I told them, "Just tell me how you want me to" -- (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

MC: The type of combat you were in with the BAR [guide?], I mean, this was jungle fighting?

EM: Yes, it was in the mountains, and up in -- it was jungles.

MC: OK. Did you -- were the Japs visible a lot, or --?

EM: They crawled around at night, trying to sneak up on you, and then they had what they call "banzai attacks," at night. They --

MC: Did you get hit by one of these?

EM: Yes. You could hear them. The lieutenant, or the officer, he'll pull out his saber and he goes through a bunch of rigmaroles, you know, and he calls the roll, and then they start screaming and here they come. You know. All you got to do is --

MC: And you just shoot them down?

EM: You just mow them down. And then, they sneak in, you know, behind the lines and fire on them carrying parties. And sometimes you just hit, you hit a bunch of them. They're trying to. But we were driving slowly toward Balete Pass, [it?] would be, at the time.

MC: OK, now, how many guys were in your unit, the groups that you --

EM: There was --

MC: -- were specifically assigned?

EM: -- (inaudible) 36 men, in a rifle platoon.

MC: Is that what you were in?

EM: Yeah, and then they had a -- they had three platoons, and they had 36 men. You had one called a guide on, that's 37; and you had a sergeant, that's 38 men; and so --

MC: OK, and how many BAR men?

EM: You had two BARs in each squad. Six.

MC: All right. Out of that 36 or so, how many survived, do you know?

EM: Oh, they were short. They lost a lot of men.

MC: How about your particular squad?

EM: Yes, we lost. I lost some men I trained with in Hood.

They were, some of them, were with the 35th Infantry of the regiment.

MC: OK, now you went in to Luzon in April --

EM: In April, and they did --

MC: -- '45. Now that was close to the end of the war.

EM: Yeah, they declared the island secured in July of '45.

MC: So you were --

EM: We'd been up since the last part of April, and I joined them just as they had finished the Battle of Balete Pass. And the Company G got the unit presidents a citation for that battle. They completely fooled the Japs. I can give you a little bit of a run-down on (inaudible) what, you know, they told, because I joined them on what they called Lone Tree Ridge, and it was the main deal of the Battle of Balete Pass. The Third Platoon of G Company moved in, they told me, late one evening on the ridge -- of Lonetree Ridge -- and it got dark. And the Japs thought there was only 38 men on there, but after dark the whole company moved in, and again, for the night. And then, they were backed up

right behind with some more companies out of the Second Battalion. And the Japs attacked, some time around midnight. I believe they counted 120-some-odd dead the next morning from --

MC: Japs?

EM: G Company, yes. And we didn't lose -- they didn't lose very many men there. They would lose the men when they would be on patrols, and get [bugged?] suddenly -- Japs appear out of everywhere, you know. On the three-day patrols, they would find these Japs, they were in a [strange?] (inaudible) --

MC: This was before you got there, right?

EM: Well, this was when the men told me about Balete Pass, that I joined them just a few days; they were still dug in on Lone Tree --

MC: Three-day patrols were going on while you were there?

EM: Yeah, we made three-day patrols looking for wounded, and all, and at night we could see them up in the mountainside, and the sweet potatoes grew wild, and they were cooking them. (laughs) That's all --

MC: So they were --

EM: They were trying to survive. They didn't have nothing to eat. The main [stream?] just went off and left them, if they were wounded. And so we'd catch some of them.

MC: And did they end up surrendering or most of them get killed?

EM: We would take some of them, and sometimes the guys would get a little distance and you'd hear gunfire, and they'd come back and said they'd tried to run. You don't know whether they did. I hope they tried to. I didn't ever have to go take any prisoners back. They never picked me; but, sometimes they -- during, at night, a bulldoze driver would back his machine into our perimeter where we was dug in, and one man would have to lay behind that blade on this side and one man had to spend the night laying on the other side. You know, that blade protected the bulldozer during the night.

MC: Because they'd come after bulldozers?

EM: Oh, they'd try to sabotage it, yeah. But anyway, we, that's what we done, mostly, and occasionally we'd have to go knock out a machine gun nest that slipped behind the lines. I didn't see a whole lot of real action there, what you'd call.

MC: So that could pretty -- (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

EM: I seen enough.

MC: -- say so enough. So you were in combat for what, two months?

EM: Yes, sir.

MC: A hard combat --

EM: It would be May, June, and part of July.

MC: But this was kind of up-close-and-personal-type combat.

EM: Yeah. You --

MC: I mean it was --

EM: Yeah, they were close.

MC: -- you were engaged --

EM: Oh yeah, they had --

MC: -- very close combat.

EM: They had had some, [the?] rifles, yeah. Yeah. But they just clearly fooled them, and they didn't know we had that many men up there, and they captured a big Jap general named...

MC: He didn't commit hara-kiri?

EM: No, he didn't. We didn't let him. (laughs) They got him. I believe his name was Yamamoto. Yeah. I believe he was (inaudible). But anyway, they -- later on, you know, and they start out with a little story and it gets bigger and bigger and bigger, and finally they wrote it up and give us the citation. It's a blue ribbon with a gold frame around it, and you wear it over your left -- over your heart here. But you can't wear it except when you're in the company, when you belong to the company, so I didn't get to wear it very long. I got my picture made, and probably I wore it [

you know?] one Sunday went to church after I got home and that was it; I put my uniform up.

MC: Right. Now, OK, the island was secure when?

EM: In July.

MC: In July, OK.

EM: And they pulled us back.

MC: Where did they take you?

EM: They took us back to, just out of a little barrio called Tarlac. It was the division on an air-gauge railroad, probably had about a dozen little shops in it, and we were out about two miles from there, called Camp Patrick. And we immediately started training for the invasion of Japan. We were issued new weapons. They had those that were recoilless, all kind of weapons, you know. And so, we were given --

MC: But you were still a BAR man?

EM: Yeah, I was still a BAR man. (laughs) And we'd go [run?] three-week problems, that we'd go down to a place called -- I believe at [Lo-pan?] -- was called Bam-Bam, something like that, and we'd go down there in this field and we'd stay for three weeks. We'd run problems.

MC: OK, now this camp, was it out in the open in tents?

EM: Yeah, out in the open in tents, no --

MC: But you had -- but that no backup from that during combat?
No showers?

EM: No, none.

MC: No clothes [to?] change? You're there for two months like that?

EM: Oh yeah, yeah. You bathe in a creek, if you run into one, or you wash your socks out and put them on, but they'll dry right away. But one time up there, they were going to bring General MacArthur back to Luzon, and so they were going to form a rifle company of 178 men, all told. They all had to be six-foot, they all had to have an IQ of 112, they all had to be expert riflemen, and they all had to be exceptionally well with the manual of arms. They had to do close-order drill, because it was going to be what they call a garrison. They had remodeled a four-story hotel, on [Newy?] Boulevard overlooking Manila Bay, for him. And the rifle company was going to live on the first two floors, he and his wife and the kid was going to live on the third floor, and then staff would be on the fourth floor, and that'd be the cooking and the mess hall.

MC: And that was in Luzon?

EM: That was going to be in Luzon. And they selected two men from each platoon to go try out for it, and I was selected out of ours. So one day, there up on the front lines, we

took all of our gear off except just our rifle, and we done [an?] eliminate, and it was five of us and they [were?] giving orders, doing different maneuvers with the rifle and stuff, and I got selected. And we had another boy -- they took us down to our corps headquarters, and they told us -- they had a big pond out there. They said, "Go get you a bath and wash your clothes, and we'll have a hot meal for you, and then you can see" -- I believe it was going to be G2 or something, G3 or whatever it was. And so that's what we did. We went out there and stripped and bathed and washed our clothes, laid them on the thing. They were dry time we got through bathing. We put them on, went and got a meal, hot meal, and then at one o'clock, we saw the colonel -- I believe he was a major -- and interviewed me. But the first question was, is, "Why do you want to be in MacArthur's outfit?" I said, "I don't care about MacArthur's outfit, but I got a wife and two kids back in Texas, and they're killing each other [back yonder?] where I come from." I said, "I want to do anything to get away from that, before I get killed." And he said, "Well, you know that if you are selected, you'll have to still be here a year or two years after the war." I said, "Not this boy." I said, "I'd like to thank you for the bath and the hot meal, but I'll see you later." He said, "What?" I

said, "I'm going back to the front. When this war's over, this boy's going to Texas." (laughter)

EM: And I thanked him for the hot meal and the bath, and I caught the next truck back to the front.

MC: OK. And that was...?

EM: That was probably --

MC: July?

EM: July, yeah. They brought MacArthur back and...

MC: OK. MacArthur was in command of the 25th?

EM: No, he was in charge of everything when they brought him back.

MC: OK, so he was a supreme commander. He had --

EM: He was supreme commander, yeah.

MC: -- this was -- but you were a part of --

EM: Lieutenant --

MC: You were a part of MacArthur's Army, in MacArthur's Navy?
(laughs)

EM: Yeah, Lieutenant General Walter Krueger was head of the Sixth Army, and that's what was on Luzon. And the 25th Division had a guy named Colonel Mullins who came from the ranks -- he was 40 years old. The other two regiments in the division had full colonels -- they were West Pointers, 26 years old each. We had the best deal. (laughs)

MC: Yeah, OK. So how long -- OK, well by this time, though, the fighting was over on Luzon, right?

EM: Most of it. They still had snipers. Every once in awhile we'd catch them. We had in our chow lines, Japs trying to eat. They were hungry. They'd slip in. And then we, one day -- one night, they said they'd dropped the bomb. This is August, now.

MC: Did you know what the bomb was, anybody?

EM: Yeah, they told us that it was (inaudible), and then in a few days they told us the Japs had surrendered, so they --

MC: What was the reaction?

EM: [Well, you know?], they told us, get ready for 500,000 casualties the first five days of combat. And we were going to be an initial unit, the 25th Division. Yeah. Probably the 27th Regiment --

MC: So you were a very happy camper?

EM: Oh, I mean, I loved old Truman. (laughter)

EM: He had the nerve to drop that bomb. It brought them to their knees. It was awful.

MC: That was probably --

EM: It was awful.

MC: -- the --

EM: Eight-hundred-thousand casualties, whew.

MC: That would have been awful.

EM: Oh, it pulverized everything.

MC: OK, so, when the war ended, what -- you said you went to Japan, anyways?

EM: Anyway, we -- [you know?] that we had some competition, you know, between the companies and the regiments and stuff, drilling, you know, and my platoon was pretty well. We won -- we was the best-drilled platoon in the 27th Regiment. We won that when they had them. But anyway, since we were the best platoon, they said, "You all can go down to Lingayen Gulf and guard supplies. We're loading them, loading now for Japan." So my company, we went down to Lingayen Gulf. That's where they had hit, you know. That's where they had attacked; that's where the three divisions came ashore. They surprised the Japs there. They thought they were coming in another way and they hit Leyte, the island of Leyte the same day, trying to [win the?] --

MC: When they had the invasion of Philippines.

EM: Yeah. Anyway, so we went down to the Lingayen Gulf and we set up camp and we guarded the supplies. Far as you could see, there was this stuff in the water, just wasted. The water had come in and taken out to sea, [tires?], three-stories high, you know, and you couldn't get one over here for love nor money. (laughs) But anyway, we loaded the

equipment out at night with them old ducks -- you know, they go on water and then land -- and we, about three or four of us one [morning?], we had loaded ammunition and all, we pulled alongside this ship, and I hollered up there, "Can we eat breakfast?" It was getting about six o'clock; we'd been loading all night. He said, "How many?" I said, "Four." He said, "Yeah, come aboard." So went aboard; got a hot breakfast. Man, it was good. They got ice cold milk; they didn't have no milk on Luzon. (laughs) But anyway, they loaded us out, 300 ships in the convoy. And we --

MC: So this is post-World War II?

EM: Yeah. We're in... Let's see, that'd be September. It should amount to middle of September.

MC: Of '45?

EM: Of '45. And we were loaded up. We're in what they call "APA boats," that's Army personnel assault. It has a battalion of men, it has their equipment, and it has four landing crafts. And the thing that -- boom, it loads, you know, it drops the landing craft down on the -- yeah. And then they had AKAs, that's Army cargo assault -- same sized boat. But when the Japs, when they made the invasion of Luzon, a kamikaze went through that ship that we were on, the *DuPage*. Went through the bridge. Just dove in;

committed suicide, you know. But they put fire out and remodeled it, and -- anyway.

MC: Put it back in --

EM: We got back on it. And so we start out for Japan, to stay a little ways, you know. Of course, they stay in convoy; they got destroyers -- DE, that's escort. They got mostly fast ships, the escorted convoy. And so they sound -- they come over the speaker and say, "There's a typhoon in the South China Sea" -- we were in the South China seas, going to Japan -- said, "There's a typhoon; we're going to try to dodge it." For seven days, we dodged that thing. So one night, we had pulled into this cove, and I never heard such a racket. Come to find out, it was a chain holding our anchor. It was about an inch-and-a-half chain, and it snapped. I mean, we lost that anchor. So they dropped another one -- we had two -- and about two hours after we went, we lost it.

MC: Is that because of the --

EM: The weather.

MC: -- weather was -- and so, you were in rough seas.

EM: But we were close to land. We were in an alcove, kind of a cove, and there was some land, I don't know where it was, somewhere out in the South China seas. But anyway, everybody had to find some way to get out of there. But

anyway, they sounded General Quarters and the captain came on and said, "We've got to go to sea. We're heading straight into the typhoon." And for three days and nights, it was just -- (blows). I mean, most of the men was sick.

MC: Did you get sick?

EM: I didn't get sick; I just couldn't get enough to eat. I was hungry! (laughs) That salt air gave me an appetite. (laughter)

EM: But anyway, they put a rope up -- they'd feed in from the side of the ship, and you hold onto that rope and go to chow. Most of us --

MC: You had to go outside?

EM: We had to go, and go back into the eating place. See, go up --

MC: It was rain and wind...

EM: Wind blowed. And let me tell you, there's holes out there. What it would do is, it would sweep, then it'd sweep again, then it'd sweep again! And that little old ship would just fall off in there, man, that boom, and do like this. So I went down inside to see who built that ship. (laughs) I was scared if Kaiser built it, we'd go sink out there, and I was going to drown, if I had to come in after that far. But it was built in Mobile. Mobile Ship Building, in Alabama.

MC: And what was that ship, again?

EM: That was the *DuPage*, and it was welded and --

MC: USS *DuPage*.

EM: Yeah. It was what they call an APA, Army personnel assault. But anyway --

MC: OK, and this was in mid-September.

EM: Yeah, we're on the way to Japan, so we finally get there. We're about 25 days at sea, and one time, some of the boys were beginning to have mental problems being that close together, and they had, you know, been just been into battle, you know. They had -- I think they said they were up 168 days without relief on Luzon, the 25th was. And anyway, we got ready to go in Nagoya. That's the second largest city on the main island of Honshu, and it's on the southern end of the island right next to where they dropped the bomb. Nagasaki and Hiroshima weren't very far from Nagoya. So, we pick up Japanese pilots to bring us into the port. One hundred yards past where the port was, was completely destroyed. B-17s. We took over. We went to a city called Gifu, where we moved and took over an air base, Jap Zero base, one B-29 rated, it was (inaudible) leveled, the city of 50,000 people. And nothing standing but a four-story reinforced concrete, in all the sides were all (inaudible). It was just --

MC: What kind of quarters did you have there?

EM: We moved out to the airbase, and we took over this Jap Zero base, and we had their barracks, which wasn't very much.

They don't have any doors on their barracks. And the third day we got there, it came a nine-inch snow and we'd been in the Philippines. Our blood was thin, and the heaviest thing we had was a field jacket. (laughs) We liked to froze. They burnt down two barracks the first night.

(laughs)

MC: Trying to build fires then?

EM: Trying to keep warm! But anyway, we took over this airbase, and some of the boys found a warehouse over there that was full of them flying jackets, all that -- what do you call that white stuff?

MC: The fur?

EM: Anyway --

MC: Oh, I know what you're talking about. It's...

EM: Anyway, they got them jackets -- and they all liked to get court-martialed for getting them jackets -- and we got them white blankets, them white wool blankets, boy, and they were warm, so everybody took one. And they got after them about it. They tried to court-martial them --

MC: But [you all?] guys were about to freeze to death.

EM: Yeah, we was about to freeze to death, see, and so. But anyway, first three days we were there, we didn't see a soul. Nobody came out. But we finally coaxed the kids out with candy bars, chocolate. They called them "D bars." It was for quick energy for us. Anyway, and when the old folks began to see we wasn't going to hurt the kids, they began to come out. First thing, you know, they're all coming out, you know, everything. So anyway, they hire a lot of them to work. We're living in the barracks out there, my outfit, the 25th Division. We took over this Jap Zero base at Kakamigahara, they called it. It was close to a little town called Gifu. And so, we stayed there till right after Christmas. We spent Christmas there. We had a good meal at Christmas. We had turkey and all the dressings and everything, and all. And shortly after Christmas, the 25th got orders to move out up to the Mount Fujiyama -- that's that big ski resort on that big mountain over there. That's where the 25th was going to stay, because they were going to stay for the occupation a long time. But there was a few of us that points, you know. I got points for combat, and I got points for my kids, so I had a lot of points, so I got to come home. They moved the division out, and they left about three or four of us there

that was supposed to come by and pick us up, and take us to the port of embarkation going back to the States. And --

MC: And when was that?

EM: That was in early January. We stayed there right [after?] Christmas.

MC: Forty-six.

EM: Forty-six. Forty-five, and then we went into January '46, is when we left Japan. They took us --

MC: By ship?

EM: Yeah, they took us down to Yokohama, which is 11th Replacement Depot for overseas shipment to the States, and there we changed our yen into American money. And then, we loaded or boarded and came home. I came home on the USS *Buckner*. It was a -- Buckner was a Marine general, and they named this ship after him. Buckner, yeah. And so --

MC: Didn't he get killed?

EM: I don't know. We lost a general on Luzon, but he was a brigadier general, I believe.

MC: How long did it take you to come home?

EM: We were supposed to go by Hawaii and have a six-day delay in route, but we didn't. They told us they got mumps and we [bought it?]. (laughs) We got home about six days.

MC: That's not too bad.

EM: No, no, we made good time. They were just supposed to feed us --

MC: Where did you come in?

EM: We came into Frisco, same dock we left from. We were supposed to go to Seattle, but they said "Oh, they got mumps up there; we can't."

MC: All right. When did you...

EM: So we came into Frisco, went right back up to Camp Stoneman where I left from. And we got in there, my division, my outfit, got in there about eight o'clock. And we come down off of the ramp of the ship, and went straight into the mess hall and we had steak and French fries and cold milk. All you wanted. And after I ate and after I done drank four glasses of milk -- they had German prisoners serving us -- they just handed me a pitcher full. (laughs) But anyway, they assigned us to a barrack, and so I went to try to use the telephone. I stayed up till two o'clock. Finally, got -- (phone ringing)

EM: Got it?

MC: Yeah.

EM: We just landed in --

MC: Let me get you started again here. OK, you just landed in...

EM: We landed in San Francisco and went back up to Camp Stoneman, and it was just a mixture of everybody in the United States Army, and this is the first time we were ever integrated. Coming home, we had all kind of people integrated with us on shipboard, sleeping close to us, you know, and stuff. This is the first time they had put them together. And it was new to a lot of them, but it didn't bother me because I worked with them all my life. My daddy had men that worked with him, for him, and I ate -- they brought me my lunch and all. They didn't bother me. That stuff won't rub off. (laughs).

MC: That's right.

EM: It won't. Anyway, they were good people. So, anyway, I stayed up till two o'clock to call my wife. I'd stand in line. They didn't have very many phones, and so everybody wanted to call [home?] and tell them you was there. But anyway, I finally got my father-in-law; couldn't get my wife awake. And so I told them, "I'm home. I'll call later." So anyway, they assigned us. We went to sleep. Next day, they got us ready for shipment. The next day we took a true train for Sam Houston, and this was really a true train -- we didn't stop for nothing. If it did stop, it would be a little old side -- little old town, and they'd all run everything, buy everything in sight, and

come back on, you know. We'd go, "We made a fast trip to Texas." And we pulled into Fort Sam Houston, and I got off the end of that train and come down the steps, and my wife was there. She said, "Earl, you need a haircut!"

(laughter)

EM: But when we left Japan, the only thing they looked at to see if you had, a skin disease and a short [arm?]. So I didn't have a haircut the whole time I was there; we cut each other's hair. Because they did have skin problem over there. Prostitution is an honored profession, and it's terrible. They had a lot of syphilis on the island. Of course, it didn't bother me. I was married. I didn't let that bother me. But anyway --

MC: So you're home, but you're not out of the service.

EM: Not yet. I'm home, my wife, and lucky we had a friend. Her husband was a full colonel in service, and they had a house there in San Antone. And they were gone, and so they let us use the house. So I got to be with my wife, and then they got us ready for discharge. And then about that time, they said, "We'd like to use you and your wife. We'll take you all to Dallas and we'll do a lot of advertising. We're going to advertise you as the millionth man discharged from Fort Sam Houston."

MC: The what?

EM: Discharged -- that'll be the millionth man.

MC: One millionth man?

EM: One millionth, right. But I said, "No, I'd rather just get that discharge and I'll go home."

MC: OK. And you got it?

EM: I turned that, so they'd give me the discharge.

MC: And when was that? What was (inaudible)?

EM: I believe it was February the 15th, 1946.

MC: Nineteen-forty-six. So you were in from -- you were in for three years?

EM: No, I didn't quite make [it?]. I was only there about 16 months. I went '44 till (inaudible). Sixteen months. Twelve, yeah, about -- well, maybe a little more.

MC: OK. Did I understand earlier? You had children.

EM: Yeah, I had two.

MC: Two boys?

EM: No, I had two girls.

MC: Two girls?

EM: Yeah, the oldest one was three, and the youngest one was five months. They were 33 months' difference in age, and the oldest one was three when I left, and my baby was five months. She was born in '44, May.

MC: OK, now how did they...

EM: They were good, because my wife had sent them things, or had bought them things, and told them it was from me, overseas. She had bought them dolls and stuff, and so we didn't have any problem getting back. They were both daddy girls, and my wife had done a good job with them.

MC: And you went right back to the Houston Fire Department?

EM: Yeah. I went right on back. They were anxious for me to come back, and I said, "I can't come back till I find a place to stay." And they say, "We took over a length of field, [not?] commissioned officers quarters, and we're giving it to veterans with children. You got it made." So they give me a little -- it was two-bedroom apartment: living room, dining room, two bedrooms and a kitchen. And I went back to work for [them?]. It cost me \$35 a month, and I paid the utilities and I went back to work. They was glad to get me.

MC: And you were living in Ellington Field, so you were driving into the --

EM: No, when I was living -- it was in Houston.

MC: Oh, OK.

EM: It was in an addition called Meadowbrook, out at East End off of Howard Drive -- you've got freeway. I was eight miles from downtown.

MC: All right. That's not too bad.

EM: No, it wasn't.

MC: In those days --

EM: It was good.

MC: In those days, right after the war, there wasn't much here, was there?

EM: Wasn't much. Just around 50,000 people there. And they were anxious for me to get back, so I went back to work.

MC: OK. Now, did you have anymore kids?

EM: No, sir, that was all we had. We were lucky to have the two.

MC: Now, where are your daughters today?

EM: My oldest daughter died at aged 54, in 1996. She had a [signal?] hemorrhage; only lived two days. And my other daughter is now 70 years old, this past May. And she works for the Denver Mental Health in Denver, Colorado. She lives in a [row?] [over there?] with her [own farm?].

MC: OK. She's about -- well, we're about the same age. I'm 71.

EM: Yeah. She, you know, got a place for me to take my wife up there, and she came by every day and spent an hour and a half with us and took care of everything. She wrote all my checks and stuff for me, be sure of -- you know, I am 94. (laughs).

MC: Ninety-four years old. Well, I think we got a pretty good picture of your military service here.

EM: That's good. I enjoyed it.

MC: Well, I enjoyed talking to you, and again, on behalf of the museum, I want to say thank you for doing the interview, but also thank you for your service to your country, again. That's the important thing.

EM: It was my pleasure. It's my country and I was proud of it.

MC: You betcha.

EM: Still am.

END OF AUDIO FILE