

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. Frank J. Nemeč

Date of Interview: November 15, 2015

**National Museum of the Pacific War
Fredericksburg, Texas**

Interview with Mr. Frank J. Nemeč

Interviewer: Mike Zambrano

Mr. Zambrano: This is Mike Zambrano. Today is November 15, 2015. I'm interviewing Mr. Frank Joseph Nemeč, who served in the United States Marine Corps during World War II, at his home in West, Texas. West is north of Waco. This interview is in support of the Nimitz Education and Research Center Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, for the preservation of historical information related to this site. Okay. Mr. Nemeč, can you tell me where and when you were born?

Mr. Nemeč: Well, it's over here. I was born October 17th, 1914.

Mr. Zambrano: And where were you born?

Mr. Nemeč: McLennan County, in Cottonwood.

Mr. Zambrano: Cottonwood, Texas?

Mr. Nemeč: Cottonwood, Texas, close to--you could put it West, Texas. You know, Cottonwood is just a--there's nothing there no more.

Mr. Zambrano: Really?

Mr. Nemeč: Oh, yeah. I was born in the Cottonwood area, close to West, Texas.

Mr. Zambrano: So it's just not even a town anymore?

Mr. Nemeč: It just had a store at one time, but the store man used to live in a house aside of it; it's gone. No more store, no more gas, no nothing. But the Cottonwood area is still--it's the Cottonwood Creek running through there.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. What were the names of your parents?

Mr. Nemeč: Cottonwood.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, no, your parents. What were the names of your parents?

Mr. Nemec: West.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, no, your father's name. What was your father's name?

Mr. Nemec: Paul, Paul Nemec.

Mr. Zambrano: What did he do for a living?

Mr. Nemec: Well, farming, and selling galvanized batteries, electric rings. I helped him make the perimeters and all that.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh. Okay.

Mr. Nemec: This was invented in Athens, Texas in 1890, and daddy was selling for him at a discount. When he died, the widow sold everything to daddy, the press and everything, all the guarantee with it, and measurements and everything.

Mr. Zambrano: So then he farmed, and he sold these rings?

Mr. Nemec: His main job, main living was farming.

Mr. Zambrano: Do you recall what he farmed? What was it that he farmed? Corn or wheat?

Mr. Nemec: We was in Cottonwood in McLennan County, and he was raising corn and cotton and wheat, and some cattle.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. What was your mother's name?

Mr. Nemec: Mary Bukowski.

Mr. Zambrano: I'm guessing that she stayed at home and raised you and your brothers and sisters?

Mr. Nemec: Yes, sir.

Mr. Zambrano: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Mr. Nemec: Well, I had four brothers and two sisters, seven in all.

Mr. Zambrano: Wow! That's a big family.

Mr. Nemec: Well, that's--not at that day. At that day, everybody had five or more. I know one that had 16, one 14, and one had 22, but they remarried; had children already from their previous marriages. I asked them to name them; I asked that lady to name them all. She

named 21 of them and she stuttered on that last one about two, three minutes, and she got it. (Both laugh).

Mr. Zambrano: Twenty-two's a lot of kids! That's a lot of names to remember.

Mr. Nemec: It sure is! I can't remember my grandchildren hardly. I've got seven grandchildren.

Mr. Zambrano: With all your brothers and sisters, where are you in the order? Are you the oldest, the youngest?

Mr. Nemec: No. It was sister Maggie, brother Emil, brother Joel, brother Louis, myself, sister Adele, and brother Vince. That's seven. I was sort of a little below the half.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. Since you grew up during the Depression, can you tell me a little bit of what that was like for you and your family?

Mr. Nemec: Well, it's in (unclear) all right but I'll tell you very simply. We had a 70-acre farm and a lot of people had small farms, anywhere from 50- to 200, and 250 was a big farm at that time. Everything was done with mules and single-row cultivators. People chopped the cotton. They planted it thick; they chopped it with an eight-inch cotton hoe and chopped it out of the grass and (unclear). If they chopped out too much dirt, they had to push the dirt back and stood up the cotton left there. Then came double rows and then in the 30s, when the Depression hit in the 30s, my brother-in-law, he was the first one around that area down there to buy a tractor. People said he's going to go broke buying a tractor, because everybody was so sold out on mules, because a tractor, you know, takes gas and this and that, tires and everything else. So we had to poison the worms for it; we had to go buy a pump and poison the leafworms when they invaded the crop. Then, when it started picking time, when the cotton started opening, we went downtown; daddy went downtown, Waco or somewhere, where he could get the ducking. My mother made some sacks. Everybody had a sewing machine at that time. You'd learn how to sew; they didn't

have to go to college to do anything. They learned everything at home and made some sacks. I was only about four years old, way below five years old, and my mother made me a sack out of maybe two yards--it's a small sack; I put that cotton in there and all this and that and put my foot in there. I got it in there so thick that it wouldn't bend. I was so weak; I couldn't raise it. So I crawled under it and then I raised it. Daddy paid a little money per hundred, usually about ten cents a hundred. One time he paid us a quarter; I don't know why, but he was free-hearted (laughs).

Mr. Zambrano: So it was ten cents per hundred pounds?

Mr. Nemec: For a hundred pounds. And we had to buy our own toothpaste, and we had to buy our own pencils and tablets when we went to school, to make people to take care of things. If you buy for the kids, he says, everything, they don't take care of it, and they go get some more. Daddy didn't want no welfares (laughs). So anyway, I think that's a good idea, and I followed that pattern with my kids, and they are doing well.

Mr. Zambrano: Did you do all your schooling in Cottonwood?

Mr. Nemec: Well, I went to a school called St. Joseph, which is part of a private school from the West parish school. My daddy and two farmers built that school on one acres, and that one acre was donated by Mr. Emil Holachka. As long as the school is there; if the school dismantles or anything like that, the acre goes back to the farm. I went three years down there, and of course, daddy had to pay tuition. Everybody had to pay tuition. Some of our kinfolk went out there; they lived on the other side. They had about 30, up to 40 children out there. They paid maybe so much a month. The teacher (unclear) college education to teach catechism and how to be an honest person instead of lying. Catechism, you know, ten commandments. Then I started to go to Cottonwood, the other way a mile and a half; to St. Joseph, I only had a half a mile. But

money was short. You had to save, and I mean you had to save pennies to raise a family and feed them because there was no welfares or no nothing. You had to make it yourself. So then after--Cottonwood was a two-room school, and St. Joseph was a one-room. One teacher taught eight grades, and taught how to read and write, I mean read and spell in Czech and English. Same book that you had in public school plus the catechisms, and Czech reading and writing. I had to learn it all. I'm glad I did because I do have some kinfolks in Czechoslovakia and Poland.

Mr. Zambrano: What did you do after you finished school?

Mr. Nemeec: Well, I started to high school after I finished eighth grade and went three weeks. It was free for a little bit and then you had to pay nine dollars a month. I quit and went back to grammar school, Cottonwood, and teacher said if I'd be a good boy, she'd take me back, because I said I wanted to play baseball. We had a good ball team, and we had plenty of help at the home them days. (Unclear) be home in the wintertime. So we had a good ball club. Well, after I finished the school, I farmed like dad on daddy's farm, and helped the neighbors always, and that money was ours. That money was ours, and then in 1939, my oldest sister was married to Ladislav Kombachek. He was born here, and his two sisters and three brothers were born in Europe, and they came here, the family. He was the last one born; he married my sister, and he had a ruptured appendicitis. He had that tractor, first tractor bought in '30s. So I was living with him then because he was hurting. So he went and had that operation done and he died, and I took over the farming chores. My sister had a young girl of ten years old and had some cattle and hogs and cotton and all this and that, and a tractor. So I farmed with her through four years. Then the war broke out, of course, I still was going, and I was deferred. In January of 1942, I went to the draft board man and I said, well,

who I am and what I'm doing, farming and all this and that. I says, "If you're going to draft me in the middle of the crop, I'm going to volunteer now for the Army or some service, because nobody can help my sister to gather the crop. Everybody is fighting. All the able-bodied men was fighting, and the other ones got their own to take care of, their families." He said, "No, we need farmers worse than we do soldiers. You're going to finish your crop." I says, "You're sure of that?" He says, "Yeah." But he wasn't. I could tell you the rest of that but it's a long story. They tried to take me in the middle of the crop, and I took him to the Board of Appeal, and the lawyer in Waco and Hillsboro, I was living in Hill County then, he made three copies and said, "Keep these, because you may need it." He didn't send it all in. The Draft Board men wanted me in the Army, and I wanted to join the Marine Corps because I lost a buddy; the first buddy that I had lost was killed on Philippines. I had it against the Japanese, and the other one got captured and was in the death march. Then later on, I lost the buddy that went to school with me, and lost another one that I knew. So I wanted to go and (unclear) Japanese. That's the reason I joined the Marine Corps because they already fought the Japs on Guadalcanal.

Mr. Zambrano: Do you remember where you were when you heard that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Nemeck: I was at home, still living in--that happened December 7, 1947, I believe--and I was at home. It was on Sunday. We heard it about five o'clock in the evening, and it was a sad day. I was at home with my mom and daddy and my brother Vince, and sister Maggie and--that wasn't in '47; it was in--

Mr. Zambrano: Forty-one.

Mr. Nemeck: Yeah, '41, '41. So I was still--I was living with my sister, but we were visiting my mother. It was just across the field.

Mr. Zambrano: In the meantime, as work, you were farming.

Mr. Nemeč: Yes. I was running a tractor. That's one thing that came in handy. That's the reason they put me in tanks later on, because I could drive a tank like a pro, that sergeant told me (both laugh).

Mr. Zambrano: Did you know how to repair tractors too?

Mr. Nemeč: Well, we went later on from Jock's Farm to Camp Elliott to take the training how to repair them.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, okay. You said that you chose the Marine Corps because you had friends that had died that were Marines, right?

Mr. Nemeč: Well, he got killed in the Philippines. Yeah, he was--I don't know whether he was in the Army or the Marines, but Joe Swertec that was in the death march, he was in the Army. In fact, I was listening, after Pearl Harbor, I was plowing, we were farming on the half. I was laying on the porch resting at dinnertime, and I heard when President Roosevelt (Imitating President Roosevelt's speechmaking), "This is a day of infamy. I declare war on Germany, and we declare war on Japan. This is a day of infamy which will live forever, and this will end all wars." Something like that and he finished up. And I just thought to myself, that's a pretty good line, that it will finish all war, but he had to pump up the people, you know. So I heard the--and he drove the only car the people, you know. And so I heard the--and he drove the only car in the United States then, to declare, to sign the declaration of war, in a bulletproof car.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh! Okay!

Mr. Nemeč: Did you know that?

Mr. Zambrano: No, I didn't know that.

Mr. Nemeč: Well, I'll tell you. That was the only car in the United States that was bulletproof. You don't know whose it was then? Al Capone's.

Unidentified voice: (Unclear) in Al Capone's car. (Mr. Zambrano laughs.)

Mr. Zambrano: I can see why he might want a bulletproof car.

Mr. Nemeč: Well, I got it right (unclear).

Mr. Zambrano: So, when you go into the Marine Corps, where do you go first?

Mr. Nemeč: Well, when I went to the Marine Corps, I went to Waco to catch a, take a, I believe there was an interurban still going then, into Dallas. I took off from Dallas to be sworn in, because I was sworn in early in 1942, not to go in, but see that I'm in good shape to go to the war, but I didn't want to sell everything for my sister, tractor and all, and then find out that I'm a 4-Fer. So I went ahead and took the physical first, then I'm okay. And I was okay, with the understanding that they send me back to sell the hogs and cattle and feed and tractor and everything and move sister to town. I had a place for her to--and the roof was leaking; I went up there and fixed the roof. And the man paid the shingles, the owner; I says I'll do it free if you buy the shingles. Then I was ready to go. Sister had a job at the (unclear) and everything, and mama and daddy was living in the country. My brother Vince later joined the Army then.

Mr. Zambrano: So you sold the farm before you left? Is that right?

Mr. Nemeč: I didn't own no farm.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, okay. You worked it, but it wasn't yours.

Mr. Nemeč: No. That's right. It was daddy's farm, and the other one belonged to Woodson Bagas of Dallas. It was a Bagas lease down there. He owned seven sections of land out there, several houses. There was O.S. Bagas, Woodson Bagas, and John Bagas. I used to pick for him, too. He was working about 400 acres with mules and workers. He didn't work; he just would walk around there and watch the pickers, and he went downtown and got a bunch of pickers. A lot of time, they all jumped in his trailer; they liked to pick for him because he had big crowd picking for him out there. He went to the black section; he could get them all. He bought them some sausage in the morning and cheese and crackers

(laughs). They were ready to go down there and pick down there with a bunch and then pick for me. But we didn't need no help. Sister was a good worker and then the little girl was cooking. She was young and she learned how to cook, and she cooked for us. Me and sister could handle it, the few acres we had.

Mr. Zambrano: You told me earlier, and it says in your book here, that you do your boot camp at San Diego. Is that right?

Mr. Nemec: Right.

Mr. Zambrano: Can you tell me a little bit of what boot camp was like?

Mr. Nemec: Well, it took us three days to get there, and I wondered what did we get into? (Laughs). Well, we had to throw our nasty knives on the floor, and this is not a floor; that's a deck. He had a stick; he says this is not a floor; that's a deck. And he had some catsup; he says that's not catsup, that's blood. Come ten o'clock, when lights out, you better have them lights out, and don't have them lights out sooner, either, because if you're tired out from walking in the desert out there, and one time we went out into the desert and every little break down there, they laid down and go to sleep. I couldn't do that at first, but I found out how to relax, maybe ten seconds--I mean ten minutes. I never was no further than Dallas and Houston and I was 28. (Unclear) some of those 17 year-old guys just coming out of school that they went right into the service. The boot camp then was--it rained, and I had a sore throat out there. I thought I might have turn in, and a fellow told me don't do it. I had a sore throat and they put me in the hospital there; I had to start the boot camp over again. So I just had some Vicks from home, and I just doped myself and I was hoping that I lived until February 1st, because that's when my 10,000 insurance takes effect. See, if I die from that thing then my mama and daddy would get the money (laughs). But I made it through.

Mr. Zambrano: You made it through.

Mr. Nemec: Yeah. On the rifle range, it was raining so hard, I never seen it rain so hard until I got to Okinawa. We had rain out there; some of those pictures I got over there, I will show you. Our tent was this much in water. We had tents where we'd sleep in.

Mr. Zambrano: I believe it.

Mr. Nemec: And these foxholes, I tell you, we had to fix the foxhole and make a trench over here and try to get some of these here coconut leaves, find some and make a roof there. On New Britain, work with that foxhole and don't dig it deeper than 18 inches, because your eardrums would be knocked out if you got it too deep and a bomb hits close to you, your eardrums would be knocked out.

Mr. Zambrano: Really?

Mr. Nemec: Yeah. Eighteen inches is all you need; that's the best depth. But some places, it was black dirt. It was easy to make the holes, and that little shovel. But on Peleliu, they had a rock and on that little hill, and our regiment which sent 95 men with an officer with them, going to capture that hill. They got on top there, but the Japs had it surrounded three ways. The infantry went up there; got on top there, and that pick, they couldn't dig a foxhole. It was so hard. Then they killed most of them; only 12 escaped back, because they closed the gap and surrounded them. A lot of them could have been saved; but they cut their arms off, their heads, and some of them cut their privates off and then put it in their mouth and tied them to a tree and used them for bayonet practices. Kind of ugly.

Mr. Zambrano: It does sound ugly.

Mr. Nemec: And sometimes we found some Japs out there in the grass, two weeks later, with maggots all over them, and the Japanese we couldn't touch, and we got some sandwiches down there and some water that was made in cans. I had a steam jenny that was steaming the gas cans out. But don't think that you can get that

gas smell out of there. Never! Never! Years later, a fellow got bombed; what I mean, in Rome, Texas, the other side of Fort Worth, I worked in Decatur, and there's several of those trucks that was hauling gas was out there, discarded. He was doing some welding around there and it exploded, that empty. An empty one is far worse than a full one. A full one would catch on fire; this one exploded and killed him right away. So I went to his funeral because the girl I was going with, she knew him. It was a sad day. So, on Peleliu, we was hard on water, and they had to drop some food and everything down there, and the sandwiches out there in the hot sun, ptomaine poison. Everybody got so sick, drinking that water from these--some of them had to be pumped out and taken to the field hospitals. Some of them drank soda and water and throw up and be sick about three weeks after that.

Mr. Zambrano: Because they were drinking out of those cans?

Mr. Nemeck: Yeah, well when you got the virus that bad and then the dead Japs laying over there, big old flies on them set down on your sandwich over here, you couldn't blow them off. You have to take your finger out there and pop them off and take this bread down here and throw it out. It was another crew that was picking up these dead Japs, but when we got a little foothold, we were supposed to take it in three days. It took us several weeks before we got control of it.

Mr. Zambrano: On Peleliu.

Mr. Nemeck: They were coming in from under the ground somewheres. There was a dead Jap over (unclear) at that window. They was eating (unclear) over there and there's a ditch down there, and a bulldozer coming down there and scraped all these trees and rubble and everything, and the dead Japs out there in the ditch and put some diesel fuel out and set it on fire. So we smelled that smoke for about three, four weeks (laughs).

Mr. Zambrano: And this is on Peleliu?

Mr. Nemec: Yeah. That was all on Peleliu.

Mr. Zambrano: Wow!

Mr. Nemec: And some of them blew right through our lines out there and got onto any tree standing over there. I saw one (unclear) and picked him off from way back there. He came tumbling down (laughs).

Mr. Zambrano: Was there a lot of fear of snipers?

Mr. Nemec: Oh, yeah. Well, on Peleliu, there was, I estimated 10,000, and they were well trained, and they were tough. They were tough, living in the bunkers. A bunker is one that is automatically in the hill, you know. They just kind of shaved the--and lived in that hole, and they were man-made. They call them, they don't call them bunkers; they call them--

Mr. Zambrano: Pillboxes?

Mr. Nemec: --pillboxes. Most of them were three foot with a steel reinforced, and some of them had it square. You knocked this one out, you got three good ones. You could knock all three of them out; they're still living in this one here. And one of those write-ups in all those books out there, Burgundy, he was on New Britain on that Cape Gloucester. Cape Gloucester had that big airstrip, and it was estimated about 100,000 Japs around there. I was on the other (unclear), and at the time we were drowning going over there with our life jackets.

Mr. Zambrano: I wanted to go back a little bit. You had mentioned Jock's Farm before, in California. What kind of training did you get there again?

Mr. Nemec: Okay, we went out there about one o'clock in the afternoon from our--it was 11 weeks training in the boot camp, but they brought it down to seven, I believe. After that they took us down there and dumped us down there after dinner. We saw those guys come off the runs, you know, I mean, they're sweaty, and all that dust!

They looked like--man, I tell you, it was dirty. It was sweat and all that. So we went to the kitchen down there, me and John (unclear), and they said, "You've got nothing left but ice cream." They had ice cream like Eskimo pies; ice cream covered with chocolate. They called it Eskimo pies a long time ago. There was two boxes (laughs), so we went to our tent that day and boy, we just ate and ate and ate. They had showers on the outside; it wasn't in a building. There was nobody living around there; it was sort of a desert-like, and a big old hill there. You had to go to the hill there with your--training with these tanks and you had to warm them up, up to 800 from--and then cool them off. (Unclear) freezing, and they'd show us a frozen motor. It was melted; it melted all the pistons and everything. You had to watch the meter. We had the light tanks training, too. Guadalcanal had light tanks and then we got back to Shermans, medium tanks. Either one of them, you had to watch the meters; when it shows 500, to start with, you can't drive it too cold, either. You have to wait 'til you get to about 800, and then you could drive it. Coming back, you have to get it down below 800 again, because it had a little freezing. If you keep going, it will keep cooling with the oil that'll be pumped in (unclear), heating parts, pistons. If you stop, it'll be metal against metal and it's too hot, you'll melt it, and I mean it was melted just like this.

Mr. Zambrano: Was it hot out in Jock's Farm?

Mr. Nemeč: Was it hot? Yeah, it was pretty hot out there, yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: What kind of tanks were you using at the time?

Mr. Nemeč: We were using the Chryslers. Chryslers, they was automatic shift, but the automatic shift didn't work out good. They quit making them. The next push we had medium tanks, Shermans.

Mr. Zambrano: Shermans. But the other one that you worked with for a little while, were those the Stuarts, the M-5? The little ones?

Mr. Nemeec: The little what?

Mr. Zambrano: Did you ever train with the light tanks, like the M-5?

Mr. Nemeec: Oh, yeah. We trained a whole lot with the light tanks, because we were so far behind in the production of war materials. Roosevelt was a little bit too tight. He should have done--got the Army ready when you knew that the Japanese are getting strength in every island there. The islands they never invaded; the Japs out there didn't know, and they had food and everything down there. Roosevelt knew it; he just opened up the NRA, National Act of Recovery, and (unclear) the cotton, (unclear) the cotton with bolls already were opening (unclear). He should have went ahead and let it mature and make some tires with cotton, you know. They were short on tires; we had to use synthetic tires and rebuilt tires. We were about two years behind. Had Roosevelt had the Army ready and some tanks and already had spent some money, we wouldn't have the Depression that long. Then they sunk nearly all the equipment, the ships that we had at Pearl Harbor, without a warning. They didn't give us no warning there. Why should we give them warning about our atom bomb? We gave them plenty of warning about it, and they didn't heed us. And don't let nobody teach my grandchildren (unclear) in school; those young teachers out there, that wasn't right. War is not right, period.

Mr. Zambrano: That's a good point.

Mr. Nemeec: But war is war; everything goes, especially when they started it like that. They killed so many hundreds of our people at Pearl Harbor and injured so many.

Mr. Zambrano: What did you think of the light tank?

Mr. Nemeec: Well, I wasn't in on it, because I went in as a replacement to Guadalcanal, and the war was just about over. What I hear from the others, I'm glad I went to the First Marine Division, because I didn't go with a bunch of rookies. They were pretty well seasoned

veterans and had been in the service already. Matty was our staff sergeant, twenty-some or thirty years already. Had nothing but scars on his head from fighting with beer bottle and what have you. All of them were tough, and they wouldn't scare easily like the other divisions were (unclear), six in all. When the war ended, we had six divisions. How many we got now? Do you know?

Mr. Zambrano: No, not off the top of my head, no. What did you think of the Sherman tank?

Mr. Nemeč: The Sherman, that's the medium tank. Well, I think--I didn't know too much about tanks, just the two, but I didn't see much wrong with the Sherman tank.

Mr. Zambrano: Was it diesel or gasoline?

Mr. Nemeč: Well, we had both. We had the Ford; Ford were gas. The General Motors were diesel. The diesel with the same amount of fuel as the gas, if they both left in a convoy here over the hill, Makin is over here, but there's fighting going on over there. They go down there and about mid-day, the gas tanks had to come back and refill, and the diesels could run all day.

Mr. Zambrano: Really?

Mr. Nemeč: The hotter they get, the better they run; the better they run, the hotter they get. They've got to be hot to run good.

Mr. Zambrano: What was your job with tanks? Were you a gunner? Were you the driver? What did you do?

Mr. Nemeč: Well, we were trained to be a driver; we were trained to run the machine gun, everything that you need to know in a tank. The machine gun, and the periscope, when it gets shattered, you stick another one in there. When they brought a tank in down there for repair, we had to repair it as best as we could. I had one ready for them to go right back in and fight some more. Sometimes we had to go past the enemy line, even, out there and fix a tank. One day, there was a Little Joe; you know what a Little Joe is?

Mr. Zambrano:

No.

Mr. Nemeč:

Okay. Little Joe is, in case everything falls, your gas tank is getting shot up and gas ran out and all that, you turn the Little Joe on enough to get out of there. It's a Little Joe to start the motor if the gas tank has been punctured or something happened to it; you could depend on Little Joe to get you out of there. And then there was the black box; we had a black box. On Okinawa we started a black box. You know what a black box is on airplanes and all that; it tells you what's happening?

Mr. Zambrano:

Yes.

Mr. Nemeč:

Well, they invented a gyro stabilizer. You know what that is?

Mr. Zambrano:

Yes.

Mr. Nemeč:

All right. Gyro stabilizer is a box about that big. We had a guy named Girouks. He was four years older than I was, and I was, on Okinawa I was already well past 30. They made me and him, gave us a little training, the only ones to break the seal on the black box. We can break it and see what--and fix it. We had a little training on it, not much but a little is better than nothing. You could take it out of there, take it with you, and crawl out of there and leave the tank behind. You could crawl out of there from the bottom there and get to a safer (unclear). The tanks had a communication there, a telephone right there in the back. You could communicate with somebody laying on the ground. Then they had an opening in the middle down there; you could drive over a dead Jap or a hurt Jap and open the tank and pull him in without bringing him in through the top. Down on Okinawa, you had a long trail down there to get over the hill and there were so many booby traps. The tanks had to travel the same place. I don't know whether they planted the traps there that night. One morning the tanks, they didn't go side-by-side too close on account of bombing. Maybe about 50, maybe 100 feet or so, they traveled in a row to go to the front lines. Hit a

trap, and it raised that, fully loaded, 36 tons, raised that, the people on the next tank were telling us, raised that heavy tank up like in slow motion, brought it upside down and burst into flame, all that gas or diesel out there, and killed everybody.

Mr. Zambrano: Wow! That was just from one mine? What was the black box that you mentioned? What did it do?

Mr. Nemeec Well, the black box, you've got your gun here; all right, I'm going to shoot her (laughs). I'll go through a bunch of rubble. You had trees down and all that and this gun goes up and down. You know, you're going to have to be lucky to hit the pillbox down there, with the A.P., armor piercers, say. Make a hole there first, and then shoot a smoke bomb in there. It's hard to hit it there. It held this gun steady, no matter what the tank do. Stabilizer, gyro stabilizer; it stabilizes the gun. All right. We were the only ones to break the seal on it, and it's controlled hydraulically and like a thermometer, you know. Mechanically, there's two things that can happen to it, not much. It's either going to work or demolish, but they invented that for the Okinawa operation. That's one thing they invented, and another thing they invented for Okinawa was Ten-in-One rations.

Mr. Zambrano: What was that?

Mr. Nemeec: Well, up until then, you know what dry rations are?

Mr. Zambrano: Yes.

Mr. Nemeec Dry rations and the other rations, C-rations. You get so tired of eating it and that big old chunk of chocolate, that thick and about that big, looked like worms was eating it by the holes. Mm, boy, it'd almost break your teeth!

Mr. Zambrano: They were that hard?

Mr. Nemeec: Yeah, it was hard, but we ate it! It was chocolate and chocolate is good for you if you ever was hungry. The ten-in-one ration got a little can, you know this little opener. You fold it there; there's

nothing to it. I had two of them and I lost both of them somewheres. (Mr. Zambrano laughs). I wish I hadn't lost both. (Laughs). We opened it up, a big old can about this big around and that big. Turkey and dressing; it had little squares like this. You set it on fire, and it'll be a nice little flame, and you put your mess kit over it and you warmed it up, this turkey and dressing. They had a little can, about that big around and that thick. You opened it up; it was fresh cheese, fresher than you'd buy in the store sometimes, when they used to cut it, you know, the round one?

Mr. Zambrano: Yeah.

Mr. Nemeč: That was good, with crackers. They had pork and beans.

Mr. Zambrano: (Sneezes). Pork and beans?

Mr. Nemeč: Yeah. They're the little cans, Van Camp pork and beans. And you warmed that up. Then when we went to Okinawa, semi-cool. Sometimes the night air was pretty cool, coming on the breeze. We stole a half a gallon of that green, dark green grapefruit juice. We buried it in the sand and watered it and put it in the shade in the tent down there, where we got off that run there. (Unclear) you were thirsty; boy, you opened that thing and, boy, you'd go and drink the whole half a gallon (both laugh). But it was good. We was fed pretty good, but that thing on a shingle, you know. You know what they called it.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, yeah, yeah, the shingle. (Both laugh). So did you think the food was, I guess, did you think the food was good? Bad?

Mr. Nemeč: Well, it was good and bad, but at least very seldom that we were lacking a little bit. Maybe on Peleliu, we were lacking on everything. Peleliu was the daddy of them all, as far as being bad, followed by Okinawa. Okinawa was a seven-month ordeal. The beachheads was nothing to it; they were buried. They had turned their houses open, turned their cattle loose, and went to the hills, to the mountains where the soldiers were, and lived with them. We

didn't see no civilians and no (unclear). But you get on out there, stick your head out like Ernie Pyle did, got three of them right between his eyes. They got the eye on you, but you don't have an eye on them. They're out there with a bunch of rubble; you've got a hole down there, until our bulldozers and all that get down there. They destroyed the bulldozers, and then they had some dummy airplanes made out of paper. Before we got there, they bombed the heck out of those dummies too, you know. They were made out of paper.

Mr. Zambrano: Were they there to fool the Americans?

Mr. Nemeč: Well, they wanted us to waste our bombs on paper, and they had their rituals for the youngsters, 15 years-old. Out there, they strapped them to the plane, and their mammas and daddies came out there and gave them the last rituals, to Kamikaze, the suicidal planes, to go and hit a ship and break it in two. We saw some of them out there on Okinawa. They were way out there. We were watching it all right; we were safe. Tojo sent all he had; he sent 5,000 of them, and our Navy was bunked out there already and they sunk quite a bit of our ships then.

Mr. Zambrano: You mentioned it in your book here, right? Did you call it a Baka bomb?

Mr. Nemeč: Yeah, yeah. That's what's in here, which it means "stupid." Kamikaze.

Mr. Zambrano: (Looking at book) I know I saw it here.

Mr. Nemeč: It's right here somewheres.

Mr. Zambrano: Kamikazes with the Baka bomb. So you saw Kamikazes then?

Mr. Nemeč: Oh, yeah. We saw plenty of them.

Mr. Zambrano: When you first get out to the Pacific; when you leave San Diego and you go to the Pacific, what island do you go to first?

Mr. Nemeč: Well, we stopped at an island this side of Australia. It's a big island, where Chiang-Kai-shek escaped with 250,000 men when the Commies were taking over. We landed in Australia; I believe.

Mr. Zambrano: You landed in Australia first?

Mr. Nemeč: Yeah, yeah, to Melbourne and then from there, they shipped us to Ballarat, Australia. It's about 75 miles from Melbourne, on a train.

Mr. Zambrano: What was the name of it again?

Mr. Nemeč: Ballarat. B-a-l-l-a-r-a-t, Ballarat. I got a picture over there; there's a girl that I used to go with over there in Ballarat. One of them.

Mr. Zambrano: Is that where you joined the First Marines? In Australia?

Mr. Nemeč: Yeah. We dropped the dog. John Polnik had a dog he fell in love with in Jock's Farm and we took it to Camp Elliott. He boarded it; he got the dog on ship. The officers found it out and they didn't want to drop it in water. They said Australia don't take any dogs from the United States on account of some kind of a disease or something. So we dropped it at this fisherman's island. I've got a map down there, but it's a little piece from Australia; it's a big island. They were waiting for the dog with a rope there. The untied the rope and we got the rope back, and they had a dog. It was a friendly dog. We went on liberty one time and the dog was in his tent, in John Polnik's tent. When we came back, he had five little litters in his tent.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, really? (Both laugh). Ah, boy. After Ballarat--oh, just so we record it, you were in the First Marine Division, First Tank Regiment, Company B, right?

Mr. Nemeč: Yeah. Well, after a while, you'll see it over here, exactly what my full address was.

Mr. Zambrano: Where did you go after Ballarat?

Mr. Nemeč: Well, we stayed in Ballarat a short time. We were out there chopping wood, because it was wintertime there, summertime here. We went on these here trucks. Ballarat trucks run on

charcoal instead of gas, and we made some wood for our little fireplaces. We had some good liberty out there. All the able-bodied men were fighting already, and the streets were full of women. From Australia, they shipped us to Goodenough Island, close to New Guinea.

Mr. Zambrano: Good enough?

Mr. Nemec: Goodenough.

Mr. Zambrano: Good enough, hmm.

Mr. Nemec: Goodenough. Goodenough Island, that's the full name for it.

Mr. Zambrano: Goodenough, oh!

Mr. Nemec: Goodenough Island.

Mr. Zambrano: Hmm, okay.

Mr. Nemec: There was air raids there, but there was no beachhead. They sent us down there for getting used--well, that's where they dropped us off; I guess just to get us used to the tropics again, because a lot of those people from Guadalcanal had malaria. They had to ship them to a high climate, and Ballarat was way up there, higher than any of them. That's the reason they went to there. A lot of them was passed out; they wasn't drunk, but they passed out on the street and some of them might have been drunk. The meat wagons, the ambulances, were picking the Marines up left and right to take them to the hospitals. Malaria was bad because quinine was scarce. They came up with atabrine; anti-brine come called it. A-t-a-b-r-i-n-e or something like that, atabrine, made out of a plant grown in Mexico. It's a yellow pill, and you take one a day. The corpsman threw it in your mouth because if they put it in your hand, some of them dropped it and didn't take it, and the grass turned yellow, so they knew somebody's dropping it, so they make you open your mouth and threw it down there. You had to take a drink of water to swallow it. I've seen one had the malaria, and it's awful to see; you're like somebody would have fits.

You're shaking and just moaning and groaning and laying on the ground or street. It'll pop it out when you take a drink; you're not supposed to drink when you've got it. Of course, a Marine's going to take a drink, most of them anyway when they get to the tropics like that. Half of them had to be rushed to the hospital.

Mr. Zambrano: Before we go on, it says in your book here that you were with the 17th Replacement before you went to the First Marines.

Mr. Nemeč: No, no. Well, no, right away I had that address. (Looking through papers).

Mr. Zambrano: Yeah, right over--where is it?

Mr. Nemeč: Well it might be that other book.

Mr. Zambrano: No, you mentioned right—"about 17 days later, the 17th Replacement joined the First Marine Division in Ballarat, Australia."

Mr. Nemeč: Well, yeah, they was already Company B, First Tank Battalion. Yeah, that's the address I had the rest of the way.

Mr. Zambrano: You know, I happened to notice here that you actually have the name of the ship that got you to Australia. Do you remember that name?

Mr. Nemeč: Rochambeau? Rochambeau was a--they got it from a War I. They took it out of mothballs; it was discarded already. It was made out of wood. It was named Rochambeau. That's a French ship that we got from them, so we could ship us overseas, because we didn't have no ships; they couldn't make them fast enough. We had some, but I went to the oldest one. Every time we'd hit a little wave, it'd creak (makes creaking noise). I said it's nothing to it; I'm not going to get sick, but I got sick all 16 days nearly.

Mr. Zambrano: Really!

Mr. Nemeč: Yeah, and then when we went out there, they fed us mutton, and the mutton can be stinky. You eat it every day for so long, fixed

the same way every day, but boy it tasted good for a few days. But pretty soon (laughs).

Mr. Zambrano: Okay, so you get to Australia; you're in Ballarat, then you go to Goodenough Island--

Mr. Nemeč: Goodenough Island.

Mr. Zambrano: --to get used to the climate.

Mr. Nemeč: Well, I guess, get used to the climate; get ready for the next push closer.

Mr. Zambrano: Where do you go from there?

Mr. Nemeč: We went to New Guinea, to help the Army there to capture Finschhafen. It says in here.

Mr. Zambrano: To New Guinea.

Mr. Nemeč: Finschhafen was the capital of New Guinea. It still is, I believe. A lot of people there; Finschhafen is big. I mean, New Guinea is big. That's where we saw Frances Langford and Bob Hope and Jerry Colonna. They came as a trio there.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, so you got to see a USO show?

Mr. Nemeč: Well, Bob Hope came out there and they'd do it right there in the field, right there by our tents. They got a platform built for them, and Jerry Colonna played the accordion, you know, had that moustache, and Frances Langford was a good-looking movie star. She died about five years ago.

Mr. Zambrano: So they came out and just entertained the troops just right there.

Mr. Nemeč: Bob Hope went out there to Vietnam, you know. Bob Hope made many trips out there. He was good to go and entertain the troops.

Mr. Zambrano: Yeah. It's tough to just keep fighting and not have some kind of break.

Mr. Nemeč: Yeah, old Bob Hope loved to do that. From there, you're going to ask me, we went to that New Guinea and helped the Army there, and they fed us real good, I'll tell you. They fed us steak and fresh eggs, sunny side up if you wanted it. The waves was so high

sometimes in an LST, Landing Ship Tank, you know is a pretty good-sized ship. You got to sleep upstairs after they had the trucks tied into places here with a wooden treadle, and you carried your cup of coffee and your mess kit over here, and the ship goes this way (makes a noise to describe the ship's movement), you can't hang onto this railing, you're going to spill it (laughs). Peter Seitz, me and him were sleeping under a truck down there, and the water was coming right under us. That big old wave come across and I'm sorry to say, but we didn't sleep too much. Peter Seitz was a great eater, and he got up early, going to be sunny side up eggs, and he went out there and he brought some eggs; he was laughing at me; I was still trying to take a little catnap. He put that on the fender of a truck and put the cup and said he's going to have to find his mess gear or something, I mean utensils or something, and the wind and wave hit it. The mess kit over there got into a wave and was going down. He was running to catch it; it went into the ocean. He was laughing at me to what he'd got; I had to still go and get mine. So I went ahead and got mine, and I came down to the door, and the man says, "We're closing the doors." It was eleven o'clock already and still people going round and round, same way, getting it over and over and over. I said, "Look, I ain't had nothing to eat yet. Please let me." "Come on in fast, little fellow. Shut the door. We got to start dinner here." (Laughs).

Mr. Zambrano: At eleven o'clock in the morning, they have to start dinner.

Mr. Nemeč: (Laughing). Well, the Marines would be going there all day long, because that sunny side up eggs, boy I'll tell you one thing; they go crazy for it.

Mr. Zambrano: What was the name of your friend again?

Mr. Nemeč: Which one?

Mr. Zambrano: The one you just mentioned whose mess kit got washed away.

Mr. Nemeč: Oh, Peter Seitz.

Mr. Zambrano: Peter Sides?

Mr. Nemeč: S-e-i-t-z.

Mr. Zambrano: Peter Seitz.

Mr. Nemeč: He was from Michigan. He was working in the car, making cars. I came to see him. My daughter lives in Michigan now, Port Huron, and she took me out, she drove me out to where he was still working at a new addition down there. He was a cleanup man; worked about two or three days a week. He was married to a lady that lost her husband in Germany, flying over Germany, got shot down. Her son had a lot of pullet eggs; they gave us a lot of pullet eggs, and some pictures that I got. I lost track of him; I don't know where--he had a place in Florida and over there. I tried both places. He was sort of an odd guy. He met a girl in Australia; he wanted to get married, but we had to move out. So we moved out to that Goodenough Island, and the officers found out that he had a wedding set up, so they made it where--fixed him an airplane ride over there to get married, and two weeks off. We were at that--doing nothing, just kind of, just cleaning our areas and this and that. So we all pitched in pretty good money. We got paid; we couldn't spend any money because there's nothing to buy. We was in the tropics now, for 28 long months. So we were not there, so we let him have a good time. So we gave him a pretty good pot of money. So they flew him out there; he came back in two weeks' time. The girl didn't want him (laughs).

Mr. Zambrano: No? She wouldn't marry him?

Mr. Nemeč: She didn't want him no more, and so he spent the money anyway (laughs).

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, okay (laughs).

Mr. Nemeč: The boys, whenever someone (unclear), they bought a lot of whiskey and wine and whatever, and put it in the Jeeps, our trucks, around the gas tanks down there, and then when somebody from

our outfit is on guard out there, they'd go down there and get it and get drunk on board ship (laughs). We traveled 31 days; some of us were on Guadalcanal; some of us on (unclear) Island. We merged into a convoy; it took us 30 days to hit Peleliu, slow convoy. Tokyo Rose gave us always a little music, beer barrel polkas, and talked to us. She was an American; you know, she was born in Santa Ana, California. She went out to visit her folks; they made a traitor out of her.

Mr. Zambrano:

That's too bad.

Mr. Nemeč:

They didn't do nothing to her. She died in Chicago. Britain killed theirs, I heard.

Mr. Zambrano:

Which one?

Mr. Nemeč:

They had one like that, too. After the war, they killed him. I heard; I don't know which it was.

Mr. Zambrano:

What was it like on New Guinea?

Mr. Nemeč:

Well, on New Guinea, we came out there, it was good. The mosquitoes were bad, and it rained pretty heavy down there, nearly every day. A cloud of mosquitoes came over there about sundown, ready to get some blood from us, about just before sundown, like a cloud, dark. I mean they came--our airplanes would spray with DDT; sprinkled our faces with it, which was later condemned here. There was an old joke going: they were so big that they used a wagon tongue for a toothpick (both laugh). One part of--let's say this is New Guinea. New Guinea probably is as big as Texas, or even bigger--right there it's covered up with nothing but so dense forest that you can't hardly walk through there. Nobody infiltrated the people there in the middle. There's some people living there; they could see them from the air, but there's no airstrips. Then, the bulldozers and all that made the way to them, and probably got some McDonalds' set up out there for them now (both laugh).

Mr. Zambrano:

I bet it's changed a lot. Did you see any action on New Guinea?

Mr. Nemeč: Yeah, we helped the Finschhafen some, with our tanks.

Mr. Zambrano: Yeah, because of all the trees, I think it would be hard for tanks to go through, right?

Mr. Nemeč: Well, the trees people wasn't even driving. They couldn't get out just like we couldn't get in. (Laughs). They were happy there. Now, we came in with our bad stuff out there, I guess.

Mr. Zambrano: With the what stuff?

Mr. Nemeč: I don't know. I don't know; maybe they came in later, after the war then. I don't know what's going on there now; I don't keep up with it. When I left it down there, I didn't care to go back. Got no idea what they're doing out there (laughs).

Mr. Zambrano: Where did you go after New Guinea?

Mr. Nemeč: Well, after New Guinea, they was going to get us ready for New Britain. Hit two beaches there, Cape Gloucester and Cape Arawe, A-r-a-w-e, Arawe.

Mr. Zambrano: A-r-a--

Mr. Nemeč: Well, right here it is. See here?

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, okay. So it was actually an amphibious landing.

Mr. Nemeč: Yeah, an amphibious landing.

Mr. Zambrano: Was there a lot of resistance on the beach?

Mr. Nemeč: At Cape Gloucester it was a whole lot worse. We had very little resistance on the beaches there. Thank God that we did, because we were drowning halfway up there, which was about 75 miles from New Guinea to New Britain. We had no life jackets, and we hit a small typhoon, high winds with the waves were way up there, and the boat was, instead of being loaded level, was like this, and the waves was coming in this way. Well, all right, we'd roll on one, and this boat didn't make this curve here. A bunch of water came over this railing in there. I was in a tank and Bull Ellis here-- we called him Bull Ellis; his name was Willie F. Ellis from McKinney--got me, "Get out of here! Let's unload! We're

drowning!” So I went over to the high place and I emptied the five gallons of water into the ocean and put the cap on tight, down in a tight place so in case we do go down, I’d run out there about from here to that corner there and grab the can, because we had no life jackets. And helped unload 50 gallon drums of gasoline with some other guys, over the railing. We had to wait ‘til the time to heave. One time we were a little late and didn’t get it over the high railing. Body came down and knocked us down back in the water. You know, the fuel and all that will float on water in a drum., you know, no matter how—it’ll float in the ocean then. Somebody found some gasoline out there; had a truck or something. We had a lot of gas for a while. Some of the other guys were unloading the ammunition were boxed in; they were heavy, big shells. Had to have two of them to throw over the side, and one fellow hollered, “Don’t throw out the mail! Don’t throw out the mail!” We couldn’t strike no matches or nothing because it was open there and water comes down there, and there was a little cabin down there in the back. Two guys that were in charge of that boat were sick, but Willie F. Ellis and Mr. Hartung, were not sick, thank goodness, and they got into that little cabin out there and took the matches down there that they had, and warmed up the carburetor, and started the fuel pump and started pumping the water out. We saved it, but we couldn’t start a jeep, a truck, or a tank. We had a few of them, not many because it was a landing barge, LSI, Landing Ship Infantry. For about three, four weeks, we had to take pencils and take our rifles and strip them down there, and the pencil lead will take the rust off.

Mr. Zambrano:

Really?

Mr. Nemeč:

Yeah, you got a little rust, like I was a sewing machine mechanic for 70 years, now sometimes the shuttles got a little rust, I take a lead pencil and I just go like this and it scratches it off, and I put a

little oil on it, I scratch it some more and wipe it off good and it'll take the rust off. That's what they taught us, and it works. We could get it clean today, but for about three weeks, it just kept getting rusty and you cannot take a chance on your rifle getting jammed in a front line or any line down there. The front line is everywhere with the Japs because they go through your line at night. We couldn't fire a shot at night because that would give up your--. We'd come real close; we'd use a machete or a knife, that big old knife we had. There's some Jap jumped into a tank with our soldiers, and they didn't know it. They took the dead Jap clothes and put on Jap clothes and throw a banzai attack. That was on Peleliu; for three days and nights they was using banzai attacks. I liked their rifle, got it on a bet, Stanley's bet. You ever seen a Jap rifle, .31 caliber?

Mr. Zambrano: Yeah, the Arisaka, I think it is. I think they're called Arisakas.

Mr. Nemeč: I don't know what they called it, but I've got one, .31, with a bayonet, too. They gave us a bayonet and a rifle coming back. Even numbers got a rifle and odd numbers got a bayonet. I made a bet with Willie F. Ellis; we joined together, and we came back together and served together. You get bayonet; I'll get the rifle. You'll give me the bayonet and vice versa. If we both get rifles, well, it's off. So I won; he gave me the bayonet. The bayonet is much longer than ours.

Mr. Zambrano: Yeah, I've noticed. It's about--it's almost like 18 inches long?

Mr. Nemeč: Well, it's not quite that long, but it's longer. Ours was about that long, only. But I say, you know, that we didn't have much chance in the banzai attack. What you go, you go with your rifle; they're coming with their long one out there. You parr him to the side there, and hit him with the butt, right there.

Mr. Zambrano: Was that scary?

Mr. Nemeč: Well, you live with it from day to day; you learn to pray if you don't know how to pray. (Laughs).

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. How long were you at Cape Gloucester before you moved to another operation?

Mr. Nemeč: Well, it's written here somewhere. We went back to New Guinea for a while; we went to Palau, and from there we went to Peleliu. The dates are over there.

Mr. Zambrano: So the next island is Peleliu, on September 15th, 1944.

Mr. Nemeč: The First Marine Division hit Peleliu.

Mr. Zambrano: We've talked a little bit about that, but can you tell me a little bit more about Peleliu, because I have always heard how terrible the fighting was?

Mr. Nemeč: Well, okay. If we had time here, if you had a whole week vacation, I've got books and writings over there; I've got pictures. I'll tell you briefly where you can understand it. Peleliu had a reef; you couldn't reach the island. We were welding on Palau, underground. We had a hole there and tarpaulins. You got to weld at night, also. Intake and exhaust to the tanks, make them longer, because when you hit the reef down there, in the water, the beaches is over here. If I had a picture, you could understand it a little better.

Mr. Zambrano: Was it like a big vent that went up like this?

Mr. Nemeč: Well, anyway, the reef is caused by the waves, you know, after so long a reef is caused, and the ship can go up to it, and amphibious tanks, they could go over it. Those can make it all right, you know, you just keep on. But tanks and jeeps, I mean, landing crafts and big ships can go, because the biggest part of it is underwater, and that reef is so tough that it took four tons to make a hole in it. I've got a big old picture out there; nothing but black smoke way up in the sky. Make a hole there where a big ship can go through and bring the supplies and all that. But anyway, the big

ships stopped over here and put them big old salvos out there down into the pillboxes and to the beaches that we're going to hit in a few moments. Then the airplanes, the bombers, came in and shaved our head over here and hit this beachhead we're going to. We were in water already up to our knees, deeper, some places was up to our nose. And keep the rifle dry; I don't know, it seemed like a long way, but I would say honestly that it was about the length of a football field that we had to walk.

Mr. Zambrano: Through all that water?

Mr. Nemec: We walked in water. The man took us down there in a little boat from the big boat, says, "Okay, jump in the water and go forward." That's the only place you can go, forward, because if you turn around your own men would shoot you. I wasn't thinking about turning around; I was just hoping to get to the beaches down there (laughs). Anyway, I couldn't walk no farther. I looked down there; there's a body over there. I reached out over there with my right hand--I had my rifle in my left--and raised him up and I shook him. I says--he had his helmet gone, his rifle was gone; he didn't seem like he was--I told the guy walking next to me; I was walking in with the infantry, because everybody couldn't ride a tank. We sealed the tank men in where they can't get out, because places we didn't know, the tank might be under water, so we had to seal them in, and then somebody from the infantry or somebody has to jump over there, take that rope (unclear), open that big turret down there so they could get out. They couldn't get out; might be on the bottom there. I don't know about that. But anyway, we had to weld for so long down there, and we had to use razor blades. One tank had a gun on Peleliu; later on then hit the barrel here, but it hit it halfway. Part of it was sticking into the hole here. You couldn't fire nothing because you might jam there and jam into your face. We had to cut this back part off, and it's pretty thick

over here. That razor blade didn't have but about this much. You couldn't use that handle; you had to use your hand, so you used your socks and whatever you could get ahold of, I'll tell you, you keep going all night long to cut that--make a snub-nosed tank. So that was one tank out there, but then this other guy hit that guy over here and he starts spitting out water. It seemed like he spit out a gallon or two and he started walking. I told him, "Come on, let's go. You'll get you another rifle from those dead Marines and helmet and all that when you get there. We'll make it; we'll make it all right. Keep going." So he started walking; I don't know whether he made it or not. Everybody was for themselves. It was one of the most disorganized deal I ever saw, on paper or in action. The other places that I heard. Get off the beaches because the beaches will be--and the planes went through. A landing ship over her got another 500-pound bomb. They're just coming round and round and round and round, and we were just about almost there when they're still dropping a bomb or two out there. Then you hit the deck down there, you hide behind a vehicle or something that was already dismantled or what have you. I didn't know what was going on, just a little piece around me. We hit more than one beach, the Red Beach and--three beaches were here. Then there was two other islands there; later on we had to fight. The Army then took over: Angaur and another one. I've got a tape on it, live action, the television, I could play it.

Mr. Zambrano: How long were you on Peleliu? It looks like you were there for about a month.

Mr. Nemeck: Well, it was--it says a month down here, but we were supposed to take it in two days, or three days at the most. Chester Nimitz wanted to hit Peleliu, and MacArthur wanted to bypass it. It was an airstrip down there, and past the airstrip was sort of a mountain, half a mountain, where they were buried in there. All around

there, they had two-by-four island; you could bring a ship here and unload and load everything underground. Nothing was done above ground for them; they was all under. You know, they was working on that thing probably in the late '20s. All those islands were that way. They had an eye on you; you had to search for them out there. The infantry--the only way I didn't get in the infantry, because I drove that tractor, and when I got on that tractor and drove it between Jock's Farm and Camp Elliott, which is about 20-some odd miles, the sergeant was on top of me, sticking out of that turret there, and I was driving. He says, "If I mess you, put more gas to it, more gas, more gas, if I mess you."

Mr. Zambrano:

If you what; if you--mess you? What was it he was saying?

Mr. Nemeč:

Well, he told me I'm going to drive; there was five of us in there, four maybe on that light tank. I don't remember. But anyway, I was the oldest and he told me to drive it; he's going to be sticking his head out of the turret there, on top, and to go faster, he's going to push me a little bit. I just (unclear) more, go faster. So, the speed limit is 45 miles an hour in that light tank. The heavier tanks don't go that fast. So we got on that highway between San Diego and Camp Elliott, which was, oh a lot of barracks built out there. It was a nice place, clean place, and they fed pretty good out there. We stripped the motors out there and everything, to learn lots about working on them. So we got on that highway there; he pushed me a little bit, and I pushed a little bit on the foot feed. He pushed me again; I pushed a little more. He pushed me again, so I got way back in that seat over here, and I went plumb to the deck. I was watching my speedometer; he didn't say, he wasn't pushing me anymore because I was down already. We was passing a car, a V-8, and a lady was driving this--aahhh--(both laugh). I was doing 45, and I watched the speedometer; I was doing 48, 50. I was going 55 miles an hour when we passed that lady, and she just

went (makes noise like the tank was making then). That thing was a-flapping; those flaps were making noise.

Mr. Zambrano: And this is back at Camp Elliott?

Mr. Nemec: Yeah, we went to Camp Elliott that way. I had it wide open the rest of the way and I stopped over there. He got out; he says, "You were driving heavy machinery, I bet." I says, "No, I just drove a tractor on the farm." He says, "I know you drove something, because you drove it perfect." (Laughs).

Mr. Zambrano: But of course, on Peleliu, you couldn't go that fast, right?

Mr. Nemec: Well, no; you have to have a grade. It was downgrade, down the hill. I couldn't do it that day on a straight, but it was downhill so that gave me more than 45 miles an hour. So I just says, "Let's go."

Mr. Zambrano: So from Peleliu, you go to Okinawa. Were you there for the actual landings, or did you come in a little bit later?

Mr. Nemec: Well, let's see. From Peleliu, went back to the International Date Line and the Equator and all that. We split up again; part of us went to New Guinea, and part of us went to Palau again, and Guadalcanal. We saw some of those ships, our ships, sunk at Guadalcanal and some of the Jap ships sunk out there, just sticking in water and half of it sticking out. They sunk some of the Jap ships out there and some of what we had left from Pearl Harbor, they sunk it at Guadalcanal. They didn't get no food down there at Guadalcanal; they couldn't bring none. They had to drop it from the air, with the few planes they had left, and some ammunition. The natives were a real help for them. They could tell by the smell where they were at. (Mr. Zambrano laughs). Yeah. They had a different smell, and they used some kind of a hair-do, and they didn't bathe, nothing like that much. Well, I got a Jap flag and all that down here somewheres, and that thing, that thing smelled a long time, and some other things, chewing gum wrappers and

things like that. One time the tank was disabled, and the sergeant told me, "Pick anybody to go with you to fix that." One time it was to fix the Little Joe, and another time to fix the black box. So, you had to be careful that the Japs were not sitting in the tank already. So the infantry protected you, and we couldn't fix it that day. We had to find a place to sleep, so we crawled on our bellies out there, trying get back to the back line there and go back the next day or something. It was dangerous at night to be up there, and we found a Jap evacuated bunker (laughs), so we crawled in it. They couldn't come from the back; they had to come through the front. They could throw a hand grenade in there, if they knew we was in there, and killed us both. They were walking down there but they were pretty far from us. There were bunkers all around; they had over 10,000 bunkers on that little island--

Mr. Zambrano:

That's a lot.

Mr. Nemeč:

--and pillboxes. That's a lot.

Mr. Zambrano:

Now you were out there, you said, to fix a tank?

Mr. Nemeč:

Well, to fix, not the tank, but the black box or the Little Joe, usually, or the main battery is out sometimes. The tank would get disabled or maybe it runs into a trap that's covered up with--even on your main road here, they could--where your tank goes like this and you can't back out, and you can't go forward. It's a ditch and they've got it covered up. You're traveling; it's important to travel on the same--but we had some that, you can't find every--they got the testing for bombs, but you can't catch them all, what I mean. At that time on Peleliu, the same thing in the garden. If you pull maybe a turnip or something out, they put a small bomb in there. You pull it and it explodes and kills you. Kills one fellow, at least, that pulls it. They told us not to eat that garden stuff, and they used human manure, anyway, to fertilize it. They had some beautiful gardens out there. They turned the cattle loose and all

that. There was five of us in that pillbox that we built, right above a road that was coming down here. We were sitting about this higher than the road. Some noise was going on in that house over there. I didn't know whether it was cattle or a Jap or what. I saw something going from that house slowly and stopped. I had the machine gun and an M-1 rifle; the rest of them were supposed to be sleeping until a certain time and someone else took over. There was five of us in that hole there. We was up above, nothing but rocky. It was rock, like white rock, and they had a road down there, right below us, almost. As it got closer for the moonlight, I could see that it's a cow. So we was in a Japanese girls' schoolhouse and we had a baseball bat still out there with us. They left the baseball bat behind. I got the baseball bat; it was coming toward where we're at, and when it was right there, I hit that cow on the head down there, and it let out a good toot. All the rest of them got their rifles and got to (unclear) and ran off. (Laughs).

Mr. Zambrano:

So, they killed the cow?

Mr. Nemeč:

No, we didn't kill the cow; just hit it with that baseball bat and it let out a big old grunt and took off (unclear). We wasn't supposed to fire a shot at night.

Mr. Zambrano:

Really? So you wouldn't give away your position? What was it like landing on Okinawa?

Mr. Nemeč:

Well, it was just routine. I mean, you had to stand guard on the tanks out there, one guard per tank. The password: if he don't know the password, you shoot him. The Japs couldn't pronounce the letter "A". Did you know that?

Mr. Zambrano:

No. I usually hear it's like the letter "R" or "L".

Mr. Nemeč:

No, it's the letter "A". Each night, we had a different password. I can't remember them all, but I can remember a few. Say I'm in a tank over here and I hear some noise; I hear somebody walking here at night. "Betty!" He's supposed to say "Grable!" They

can't say Grable. They're "Grah-ble." Well, there was one; you don't know the password. Somebody's going to sell the passwords and make some money off it. I don't see who would want to do that, but anyway, they had to have a different password every night. Another one was, "Texas." You're supposed to answer "Dallas." They can't say "Dallas," it's got "As" in it.

Mr. Zambrano: So, how would they say "Dallas?"

Mr. Nemec: Oh, just like somebody that's tongue-tied. (Makes sound like a Japanese trying to say "Dallas") They just can't say it. Their tongue just don't twist right. Just like a lot of these tongue-twisters that--like I speak, well I understand Czech and White Russian and Polish and all the Slovak languages. Well, I can twist my tongue, where just--my kids can't--they got college educations, but I got a lot of things. They didn't teach that in college; they have to ask me (laughs). Free! Say like "gobble, gobble." Some people can't say "gobble, gobble." These tongue-twisters, sometimes it's hard to--people to say. But they always find somebody with some names with "A" in it, say "Barbara" or--there wasn't much of it, but we had one man with a small child walking there, and I got off that tank and the next tank, the Japs start coming in back to their homes, but they made a grave mistake; they start coming in at night. This man was coming in with about a 10 year-old kid, and he couldn't pronounce the password; he shot him dead. It kind of hurt to see anybody killed innocently. But war is war, and we had to get adjusted to it.

Mr. Zambrano: Did you see any Japanese prisoners ever?

Mr. Nemec: Well, yeah. See, on Guadalcanal, the boys tell me, they're coming out, and I've got some pictures where they're coming out with white flags. Surrender. The Japs were out there in a bunch; a couple of them had a light machine gun, .25 caliber I believe their machine guns are, is that right? They're light. They've got them

on their back; they lean down and another one pulled the trigger and mowed the Marines down. So the Japs made a deal; safest Jap is a dead Jap. Don't take no prisoners; safest Jap is a dead Jap. But the officers always begging for prisoners, to get some information. Mrs. Roosevelt came to see the Marines in Australia after Guadalcanal, and she had a platform there. The people that I talked with said she was a nice lady. She wore--she was a big stout woman, like she could chop wood all day--(Mr. Zambrano laughs).

Mr. Zambrano: She was big.

Mr. Nemeč: Yeah, and she was talking on this platform but (unclear) this drunk Marine over there (unclear) on her legs; pulled her hair. She says, "What do you want?" He said, "I just wanted to tell you, you're the most homeliest, ugliest woman I ever saw." She said, "You're the drunkest person I ever saw." He said, "Yeah, but I'll be sober tomorrow." (Both laugh).

Mr. Zambrano: Did you get a chance to see her?

Mr. Nemeč: No. I came in a little later. We didn't come in until they was back already in Australia. In Australia, I was about 2,000 feet above sea level, and going on that train down there between Melbourne and-- Australia in the middle is desert, nothing but kangaroos and cottontails. We saw nothing but cottontails down there, just like this, just coated out there between the mountains, the valley down there. Over there, we could go downtown over there, and they had one place down there for servicemen especially. Buy stuff, dressing, stuffed rabbit, full rabbit, for 50 cents, and bread and stuff with it. And boy, it was good after chopping wood all day long. And buy those 15 cents glass of beer, you know, and John Polnik that had that dog down there, he always liked to get drunk. I told him, I says, "Don't you get drunk out there. I ain't going to take care of you." But he did get drunk. He said he's got 50

pounds in his money belt. I told him, “Don’t tell nobody that you got 50 pounds of money.” And we got out of that place out there, I thought I would get him something to eat, he might sober up a little bit. I had to grab him right in the back; we had to walk upstairs, and make sure he don’t fall, and guide him up there. Sat down over there and he was talking; he had a tie, you know those Marine ties, and I ordered some soup, hot soup, that he would sober up. He went ahead (unclear) and got a little past his soup and fell in his soup! (Both laugh). After he ate, the girl brought some napkins or something and wiped him off. We got out on the street; he said, “I’ve got 50 pounds right in this belt. If anybody wants it, come and get it.” So I got him on a tram; a tram is the streetcar there, you know, and sent him on back home. I didn’t care where he was going but get him out of my sight. But he made it out there. Somebody, Peter Seitz, I believe, was in the same room with us, I think. He laid him down on the bed (unclear). He went ahead and took this bed; he came in drunk and turned over his bed, and the bed on top—it was raining at night, and water dripping from the tent down there right under him. He started hollering at five o’clock in the morning, “Where am I? Where am I?” (Laughs). He didn’t know where he was.

Mr. Zambrano: What was his name again?

Mr. Nemeč: John Polnik.

Mr. Zambrano: John Paulig?

Mr. Nemeč: P-o-l-n-i-k.

Mr. Zambrano: John Polnik.

Mr. Nemeč: He was from Hamtramck, Michigan. It’s a Polish suburb in Chicago.

Mr. Zambrano: So, another friend from Michigan, because wasn’t Peter Seitz from Michigan also?

Mr. Nemeč: Yeah, he was working with the car people out there. Dearborn, I believe. He was from Dearborn, and we had another one, I can't think of his name right offhand, but anyway, there was quite a few from Michigan and from out west out there. East. The First Marine Division came from the coal mines out there; a whole lot of them were in the coal mines.

Mr. Zambrano: When you were on Okinawa, do you remember when they raised the flag on Mount Suribachi?

Mr. Nemeč: Well, we had news but that was in Iwo Jima.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, I'm sorry. You're right. What am I saying? Okay, never mind. You're right; it was Iwo Jima.

Mr. Nemeč: Now, I'll tell you, where we lost a lot of men I know, on Okinawa, was the Shuri Castle.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, the Castle, right.

Mr. Nemeč: It's supposed to be about 60 foot deep, where the king lived. That was a murderous fight, to dig them out of that hole.

Mr. Zambrano: Can you tell me a little more about that?

Mr. Nemeč: Well, I was not in the infantry, but we had the tanks. Of course, I kept going with the tanks. We had some disabled tanks, so it was my job to always take care of the tanks with some other maintenance men. We had to keep them in tip-top shape for the next push, which was Tokyo Bay, when the war ended.

Mr. Zambrano: Did your battalion have any of those flame-thrower tanks?

Mr. Nemeč: What kind of tanks?

Mr. Zambrano: I know that there were some flame-thrower tanks that they used in the Pacific.

Mr. Nemeč: Oh, yeah, yeah! Oh, yeah, flame-thrower tanks, yeah. They'd throw that fire; I mean that saved a whole lot. First, they'd come to a tank and use the armor piercing, or the bazooka--you know the bazooka--it hit the tank and it burns itself a hole in there, and then you can throw the scatter shot in there, smoke screen in there,

things like that. You've got one shell that's a smoke screen; you shoot it in that hole down there and bursts in there and boy, it'll smoke you out of there, come out of there. That's one way, and the scatter shot will kill you, you hit that hole down there. That's where these gyro-stabilizers came in handy, so when you aim that 90-millimeter down there, or 75-millimeter, whatever you got, that you don't go this way, that you're going to hit that little hole down there and go inside and do the job.

Mr. Zambrano: Sounds like you have to be really good at aiming your cannon firing.

Mr. Nemec Right. You had to be--you know what a periscope is, don't you?

Mr. Zambrano: Yes.

Mr. Nemec: All right. The periscope got about that much (unclear) driver and the assistant driver got a periscope, too, and they see exactly where they're going. If they hit the periscope with any, you're going to shatter that, they're going to pull it down and jam another one in there. The Japanese are going to have to be pretty accurate to hit that little, almost like a beehive, little hole there for the bees to go in. A little bigger than that but pretty close to it. Best explaining, you've got a little spot to look to see where you're going. Of course, the turret can be turned around completely all the way around, you know, where you can see. Then we had those tanks; we welded a bunch of bad tracks. On tanks that wasn't fit to repair, we took the track and welded it to the side of the tanks.

Mr. Zambrano: For extra protection?

Mr. Nemec: Yeah. If a small bullet, a bazooka or something hit it--you don't say nothing about that over there. I've got some pictures here that you could see.

Mr. Zambrano: Do you remember when you left Okinawa? Do you remember about what time you left Okinawa?

Mr. Nemeec: Well, it's on there again, too. I've got it all down there. It says about--

Mr. Zambrano: Where is it? Oh, okay. Last week--

Mr. Nemeec: Sunday morning, we hit it April 1st, 1945. It was Easter Sunday morning. April 1st.

Mr. Zambrano: So you're there April, and it looks like you leave in September of 1945?

Mr. Nemeec: Yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: And you go to north China?

Mr. Nemeec: Yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: What did you do in north China?

Mr. Nemeec: Occupation duty. You had to disarm the Japs. You know, China was hit by the Japanese in 1937, and that's when my friend, his daddy wore these rings. He couldn't get on a cultivator and he bought these rings from my daddy. After about 30 days, he got back on a cultivator and wore these rings and never had any trouble anymore. I got a bushel full of testimonial letters, and he got captured at the embassy in 1937. A. R. Blahuta. A.R. B-l-a-h-u-t-a. He was a prisoner of war from 1937 'til the end of war.

Mr. Zambrano: Where was it that he was captured?

Mr. Nemeec: He got captured at the embassy down there in China. The Japanese invaded China in 1937, long before we did. Roosevelt, though, he was a little too cheap that time; to start something already more than he did. They said Roosevelt got us out of the Depression. No, it wasn't Roosevelt; it was Hitler.

Mr. Zambrano: That's a different way of looking at it.

Mr. Nemeec: (Unclear) a little bit, then he went to work (laughs).

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, I forgot to ask you. Do you remember where you were when you heard about the atomic bomb?

Mr. Nemeec: All right. The atomic bomb, when we was on Okinawa, that's when it happened, the atomic bomb. All right, it was getting

down to where we sensed the end coming, pretty soon. I'm a Catholic, and we had our nine-day novenas to pray for peace and took Communion after nine days. We had at that time the second bomb, which came, what, a few days later after the first one. We finished our nine days of prayers, and our camp where we already had set up was about 100 yards or so--we had some tents put up already, but the war was still going on. Some snipers were watching our movies way out there on the tree, but we didn't bother them as long as they didn't bother us. (Mr. Zambrano laughs). We had our tents put up; there was five of us in the tent where I was. One's name was Friday, and another one was Breeden. We finished our novena, and just when we took our Communion, we heard the dirtiest screaming going on out there where we had our kitchen and the tents put up, and the generators put up where we had lights, you know, and had some real movies. I said, "The war must have ended!" because we knew already a few days before that the four-engined bombers, the Liberators and all that, were so high over there on Japan, they couldn't reach us with no kind of gun. They dropped millions and millions and millions of leaflets, "Please stop the war. We're going to drop a devastating bomb and kill a lot of innocent people. Please stop the war." They didn't give us any warning on Pearl Harbor. That's why I'm telling the teachers or anybody else, we would have bombed the heck out of Japan if they didn't stop it, and kill a lot more people than we did with the atomic bomb. And maybe have killed me because Tokyo Bay was the next shot. Every man, woman and child was ready to, just like in Poland. Instead of helping Poland, the Germans, the Russians, each other helping them, they jumped them, the Germans one side and the Russians the other, and squeezed in. A thousand Polish fighters escaped from Poland knowing that it was useless to lose the planes. They

flew to Britain, under Churchill. When they got the planes and everything from the United States and their own, these Polish fighters says, "I'm going" Let me go, let me go!" They wanted to get reprisals. They said it was the best fighters they had down there then.

Mr. Zambrano: Yeah, they wanted to get back in the war badly.

Mr. Nemeč: Yeah, because Churchill had to be underground down there. I mean, it shook the devil out of them. Germany sent 1,000 planes to bomb them in one night in one place, and they took a beating. Then Germany took the beating.

Mr. Zambrano: So, can you tell me a little bit about your occupational duty in China?

Mr. Nemeč: Well, the occupation duty, I went down there--all of us didn't go one day. I went out there October 5th; the big part went out there October 5th with our tanks. We got two quarts of whiskey, each one of us. To go a little backwards, that day on Okinawa, when the war ended--let me go back a little bit. I never seen nothing like that; it was such a glorious, goose pimples, shouting and thanking the Lord and just--I can't explain the happiness after 28 months out there, didn't know whether we were going to see the sun rise the next morning, on account of the fighting going on. We had a mail call, and you know how many letters I got? Sixty-eight!

Mr. Zambrano: Wow!

Mr. Nemeč: Every one of them nearly, every other one, people were mad at me getting so many; they didn't get none. Something that was--it took me three days to read it, because I couldn't read because something else was coming up always. Mr. Friday got two quarts of whiskey that night, wrapped in funny papers. We drank whiskey and we played cards 'til we laid down and gave out to get our little catnaps (laughs).

Mr. Zambrano: What was Mr. Friday's first name?

Mr. Nemeč: I can't remember exactly what his name was. Mr. Friday. He died. We were living in the girls' schoolhouse there in China, too. The girls were gone, of course, and we had a room out there, laying there like sardines, Company B. Mr. Friday was out here by the window down there, and it was cold out there--this was like our northern states--getting that sun through the window. He had something over his eyes, his handkerchief or something, to keep the sun off of his eyes, and he had his (unclear) getting that sun. It felt good. Sometimes if an officer comes in, somebody hollers, "Attention!" and we jump up, you know, and everybody (unclear) so long, and the officers don't come hardly ever. Here comes a real officer and somebody jumped up and says, "Attention!" And Friday says, "Blow it out your ass!" (Unclear). I was standing up already; I says, "Friday, the real McCoy! It's a captain!" Real McCoy: he jumped up, red in his face, and he came right up to him and looked at him out there (unclear). They were pretty good; they thought that, the war like that, they'd slide off a lot of things like that. But boy (laughs).

Mr. Zambrano: So he didn't get into any trouble?

Mr. Nemeč: No. He said, "Blow it out your ass!" in a loud voice. I can't think of his name, his first name.

Mr. Zambrano: So, were you supposed to guard something in China (unclear, both speaking together)?

Mr. Nemeč: Well, we had to always take a guard. I tell you what; in China, we had to always put a guard on our tanks, a guard on where we--guard duty, guard duty. While we was on Okinawa, one time I had it from ten to twelve, no twelve to two, something like that, past midnight. Another guy, a guy over there, he went to the office and first thing you know, they changed it and made mine from two to six. That's the worst hours, you know. I went up to the office; I says, I told that guy, I says, "How come you changed it?" He said,

“Well, so-and-so came over today. He said he wanted it.” I said, “Lookie here.” I says, “I was put on there first over there. I want my name over there put in back where it belongs in the first place.” I says, “I’m not going to take that.” So he did, and I went to that guy. I says, “Don’t you do that again to me out there.” I said, “They put you down there instead of me. If they put you (unclear), don’t you go down there and try to change it,” I says. I had one pretty good fight out there with Mr. Jester. We got paid over there with Japanese money; I’ve got some of the Japanese money here. A \$500 bill was worthless; it’s puppet money, invasion money. They didn’t have no value because they wanted the American dollar and they just kept going up, 5,000 for one, 63,000 for one of ours. One time I went to eat, from Tientsin to Peking and we was on a train, getting shot at, and we both ordered a chicken apiece, and we bought the Peking duck. You’ve heard of the Peking duck?

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, yeah.

Mr. Nemeč: It’s good, roasted Peking duck. We sliced it over there. We was hungry, riding the train, didn’t eat nothing all day, and we had plenty of time to eat. They were going to spend the night down there. Next morning, there’s all the kids out there dressed in black, and they had the teacher in black. We was on the fourth floor, and he started, “Mao gives you candy. Hey, Mao gives you candy. What God gives you? God gives you nothing. Mao, let’s give Mao a big hand!” One of our guys poked his head out the window and says, “Kids, don’t you believe that liar!” (Laughs).

Mr. Zambrano: Moe. Who was--what was Moe?

Mr. Nemeč: That’s when I predicted China was going to fall to the communists, when I came back within two years (Unclear).

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, Mao.

Mr. Nemeec:

That little island I couldn't think about a while ago, is Formosa. You know, I said it's close to something--Formosa. It's a big island. That's where the fishermen, French fishermen, live right there, most of them. Formosa. Anyway, back to China now, we went to dances out there. We were supposed to go, not by ourself; go in a bunch, four or five, full belt of ammunition, M-1 rifles, and don't go to the red district, the streets. The call girls were--there was one Czech doctor out there, me and another Czech, the only Czech that served with me, we went to see him, and he says those girls were captured by the Japanese soldiers when they invaded China here, and took them to live with them, marry them, like. Now when you came out here, he said, they left, the soldiers. You could ask any of them to marry you, they'll marry you right quick just to get away from the Japanese now. They was about 30-some-odd years old, because they captured them in the 30s already, '37, '38 or '39 and on down the line. So he says the best thing to stay away from them, you know. They're full of disease and what have you. I says, "Well, I wouldn't touch them with a ten-foot pole" because my life is worth more than that to be wasting it like that. So in China, then was importing the ammunition and getting ready for the next push, but the war was over. Now you have to understand, but we already had the tanks ordered and I got some pictures where I'm--I used to grease them, too, and trucks. So I was pretty busy doing things like that. And then I had a guard duty. I was a corporal, and I was supposed to relieve him every two hours or four hours. You got supernumeraries, a couple of spare ones in case two of them can't serve; you've got some, like a spare tire in your car. Supernumerary, they call them.

Mr. Zambrano:

Supernumerator?

Mr. Nemeec:

Yeah. Supernumerary; I don't know how you spell it. These two supernumeraries, I forgot their name, well, supposed to relieve

those two guys that's on there now. It was before midnight, and to me, they were drunk as hoot owls, but I can't prove they were drunk. But they were sick enough not to stand guard; that's what I used, because you could eat a lot of things down there, that they'd get ptomaine poisoning and get that way. I'm pretty sure they were drunk, but I couldn't prove it. I said they were too sick to serve, and when I couldn't wake them two guys up, and I wake them up, they couldn't hardly talk or nothing, and they slept on the floor down there. We was ready to go home, to the ship to start going home next morning, and just watching our tanks and all that over there yet. One of them was married and had three kids at home. He fell in love with one of those half-breeds out there and she was going to go home with him. He wanted to take her home; he bought her a home out there for \$350.00, a brick home. We told him what a fool he is. She wasn't a Chinese; she was sort of a half-breed.

Mr. Zambrano: Like Japanese-Chinese?

Mr. Nemeck: Yeah, something like that. A pretty woman. He was about middle-aged, and he was married and had a wife at home, three kids. The officer said she can't go; she had her suitcase and everything right then. She wouldn't do it and she was going to go, and he turned around, and there's a bank down there, you know, the river was low, and it had a bank over here. When it rained, it raises up. He turned around; she kept on coming. He turned around again and kicked her real good in her butt and shoved her down there on that bank out there. She sat down by that suitcase and starts crying. He was out there waiting on the gangplank to go on ship (laughs). So then he stood out there on board ship, looking at that water there, on the top shelf, top board. We thought he was going to jump; he was going to jump to the water. You know, you could get crazy enough to do that, but he didn't, and it was a blessing for him,

going to destroy his own life with three kids at home for something like that.

Mr. Zambrano: Where did you go after north China?

Mr. Nemec: Well, let's see. Can I finish the China yet, these two guys?

Mr. Zambrano: Sure, sure. Go ahead.

Mr. Nemec: Next morning, I--there's always an officer that's over you, you know. I was the corporal of the guard. I got to replace them, take a jeep and take the other ones, put them back to bed and the two out there to take their place. It was about nine o'clock in the morning; I didn't hear nothing about it. I says I'm safe. "Frank Nemec," about ten o'clock, "You go see officer so-and-so." So I go up there and he called those two guys that were sick, too. So we're standing, one-two-three. I was standing and he was over there standing. He's a tall guy. "Frank, I understand that you--Mr. Nemec, I understand you had to use your supernumeraries. How come you had to use your supernumeraries?" I says, "Well, they were too ill to stand guard, so I just had supernumeraries to replace them. That's all I should do." "How were they sick?" I says, "Well, I don't know. I know they were ill; they couldn't stand guard." All I was interested in was to get those to the post out there in the field. The least you say, the better. He looked at those two guys standing over there, just sobering up. "Why don't you ask them?" I'm not going to say that, like that. I told those two guys that went up there; they didn't want to go. I says, "Look, you're going to be worse off than these two guys that were probably drunk or sick, because you had sense and they didn't." I says, "All of you are going to be in big trouble, including myself maybe, because I'm doing all I can." I says, "Please, please, please. We've been out here a long time over there. Are you going to ruin these boys; give them a court martial?" I says, "For about two hours it was, maybe four hours of your time you had to

stand guard for.” So I took them into it. I says, “Tomorrow, kick their butt; do whatever you want to do. I’ll help you to kick the butts.” “No,” they said. “But today, please go out there, do your duty here to follow orders. You’re not following orders.” So they went; I talked them into it.

Mr. Zambrano: Who were you saying this to?

Mr. Nemeč: To these two guys; they were sober and didn’t want to--they wanted to sleep. They had to get up in the middle of the night and go down there in the dangerous streets out there, with the Chinese walking these streets all night long. They’re liable to go knock you in the head and go dump you in the river, which they did sometimes.

Mr. Zambrano: Really?

Mr. Nemeč: You had the gun and all that. You had to be (laughs). But everything turned out all right. He said, “Dismissed” finally, and those two guys, I don’t know. Well, I’m pretty sure they hit a beer joint somewheres, but I couldn’t swear to it. They might have ate something that got them sick (laughs). In court, you have to have proof, you know.

Mr. Zambrano: Yeah. No, I understand.

Mr. Nemeč: I don’t know who these guys are anymore. I know some of them, but some of them I don’t (laughs).

Mr. Zambrano: After China, did you go to Guam?

Mr. Nemeč: That day, when that girl was going to go with him, we was on our way home. We were on a small ship to enter the big ship standing out there in the bay to get on the big ship and go back to San Diego.

Mr. Zambrano: Really. Okay. Did you go to Camp Pendleton when you got back to San Diego?

Mr. Nemeč: We went to the Marine Base, to the discharge center, but I turned in with my back problem to the sick bay. The sick bay took me to the hospital then. I got it over here what time I entered.

Mr. Zambrano: Can you tell me again how it is that you hurt your back?

Mr. Nemeč: Well, it was in the front line on Okinawa. The tank was disabled and needed new batteries; it wouldn't start. The batteries went dead for some reason. I went by myself; they didn't give me a helper. The batteries weigh 165 pounds and I weighed 155. You have to lift it up to the top turret out there, and get it in there and take the old one out with some wrenches to get the old one out and get those things out there; grab those things and get that 165 battery out of that hole and put it out here, and put the other one in there. That's how I hurt my back. Doing it in a hurry. Inside I wasn't worried so much as I was on top trying to get it in, because you're an open target.

Mr. Zambrano: You said earlier that you were being shot at while you were doing this, right?

Mr. Nemeč: Well, yes. You're always being shot at no matter what you're doing out there on the front line, because the Japanese, they got an eye view on you.

Mr. Zambrano: You told me a little earlier that your back hurt so much that you couldn't touch your toes?

Mr. Nemeč: Well, I had a hard time, with great pain, to tie my shoes.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, that was it, to tie your shoes.

Mr. Nemeč: But I hurt; but I still hurt pretty good. I didn't want to really-- when I went to China, I started getting better a little bit. First thing you know, you hit the good cafes out there. T-bone steak, French fries, and rice and all this and that. I sold my cigarettes on the street and got enough money to buy some good food and some beer. Are you thirsty or anything?

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, no. I'm fine; thank you.

Mr. Nemeec: Okay.

Mr. Zambrano: So, let's see. You're released from the hospital in June of 1946, and you're discharged in July of 1946.

Mr. Nemeec: But in the meantime, they sent me home for 30 days for convalescent leave. In between there, they gave me a 30 day--see, when I went to the hospital, I told them I never had a pass except 48 hours in Australia. They didn't believe me. I had to go to the Marine Base, and the sergeant over there was so mad, he typed out a letter out there; it says, "Give this man all he wants!" They paid me 30 days for four years, three and a half years that I've been in, and was supposed to get 30 days paid vacation. They paid it in money. I never got it, because I was overseas fighting and I never had a 72-hour pass or anything, just a 48-hour pass. So I got a 72-hour pass, and I went to Hollywood, California. I met a girl down there and some friends out there, and we hitchhiked out there, me and Peter Seitz hitchhiked after midnight Mass in a drizzling rain. And I think we had a couple down there, they were Jewish, their name was--I can't think of it right quick--but they married sisters and they had a couple of girls, and we rented a--in San Diego we met after midnight Mass--no, in Hollywood, I believe we got a bed, just a cot down there for 25 cents, to sleep, and next morning the radio was saying, "Take these boys home. We can't send them home for Christmas. Take them home for Christmas dinner." So I told Peter Seitz; I said, "Let's go." So these two brothers picked us up and we had--our faces were yellow from these atabrine tablets, and we were like wild animals in public, because we weren't used to the public; we were in the tropics. So we told them, excuse me, we say a bad word or something out there, there's so much that was going on that it might slip. "Oh, that's all right. We'll understand. We'll understand." So Peter Seitz, we came in--they could see--oh boy! We came to a Hollywood suite, and they was

in Hollywood, California, and they had a shop of their own, remodeling--rewinding small motors. Their hands were cut up from the wires, and the girl said he and I and Peter Seitz and his girl and a couple of fathers sit over here, and the mamas were sitting over here, like this. Two papas, Peter Seitz, me and this girl over here. They had cranberry and all that Christmas deal, boy! And the house was--I would seem better in a country home with (unclear), be better in. Well, Peter Seitz dropped the, just the water right there, spilled a glass of water on the white linen. I really felt bad. They came out there, "That's all right, that's all right." So, he reached out over there; that's the biggest drumstick I've ever seen. Peter Seitz was a heavy eater, and he got that drumstick out there, and he was carrying it; it fell off of his fork or something. It fell on the floor.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, boy! (Laughs).

Mr. Nemeč: If it had hit my toe, it'd break my toe, I believe. And boy, I really felt bad now. I wished I was out there in the foxhole again. Oh, again, "That's all right; that's all right." We started eating there; I just thought to myself, what the heck! I'm going to just try to enjoy the coffee and what have you. (Unclear) said, "What are you drinking?" I said, "What do you have?" "We have whiskey, wine and anything you want." I said, "Well, I don't drink whiskey. I don't drink much of anything, but give me a shot of whiskey." (Laughs). I saw out of the corner of my eye over there, one of the men took his finger and purposely turned over a cup of coffee. "Oh," he told his wife. "Oh, I dropped my (unclear)." Kind of took the burden off of us, you know. We went out swimming. I had Monday off. They had to work, and I had the whole house by myself, and all the eats down there from Christmas and all the drinks out there. Peter Seitz was gone, and I had a 72-hour pass. Still, Monday was my day. In the back they had places where you

could get an umbrella here on you, and take your socks off, and take your warm there and read the papers. The girl had a red swimming suit, and she had to watch the dog, so it don't get that swimming suit. I said, "Don't worry about it; I'll take care of him." I went to sleep; we stayed out swimming late, and the old man always took us up; she called, and he came and got us, and I heard some kind of a noise; I woke up, the dog had that swimming suit (unclear, both laugh). So I tried to pay for it; I didn't have much money, anyway, but she wouldn't take it.

Mr. Zambrano: It says here that you were discharged in July, 1946, as "unfit for duty." I guess because of your back?

Mr. Nemeč: Yeah. Well it's only what it is. It says what it is.

Mr. Zambrano: It says, "Permanent service-connected disability."

Mr. Nemeč: No, it's the name of it. 1635.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. 1654?

Mr. Nemeč: Yeah. Now, what that means, I don't know.

Mr. Zambrano: Myoscopic chronic lumbo-sacral spine. So, you also got malaria while you were in the Pacific?

Mr. Nemeč: Yeah, we all had malaria, but if you take that atabrine, it kind of checked you, like you would take blood pressure pills. You've got blood pressure, but you could be checked. You had to take it so many weeks or months after you got out, and I left some in the washer at home, and all my white shirts turned yellow. That was the best dye (both laugh).

Mr. Zambrano: You mentioned earlier when we were talking that you were a sewing machine mechanic for 70 years?

Mr. Nemeč: Well, it'd be about 70 years now, just about another few months, I'll be 70 years working on them. Well, what it is, I started working in the--when I came back--let's see, my brother got married in '37; he worked the farm with his daddy and mama, and times were hard. I took him to Lawrence Manufacturing

Company, the owner, close to Labella's in Dallas. I tell you, he had a home there, and he had three homes over in Cedar Hill, and a big lake and 100-some odd acres. That's where he had his outing house out there, and brother Joe moved out there during the war. He lived in downtown. He had two houses in town, but he was a butler, and filled up the drinks when there were parties and all that. Then he became a truck driver for Lawrence, taking it to these out-of-town places. He had one in Decatur, and Cleveland, and Mehaya, and then later on at West, where I worked, all that. Anyway, he wanted me to work in Decatur because that man got hurt over there. He got wrapped around a shaft out there, and the ladies were going to cut off that big five-horsepower motor and froze, and the boss lady, she was in the factory--she grew up in the factory and she was a pretty good mechanic. She taught me a whole lot, how to start. I didn't know much about machines then yet. She cut that five-horsepower, that shaft; he was kind of working over here and that loose shirt wrapped around that shaft over there and kept rolling (unclear). All the buttons flew off his long johns over here. The lady took a pair of scissors and cut off, cut his long johns off, and he hurt his arm. That was the boss lady's husband. So he lost his job; so I got the job. I didn't want it; I didn't want that kind of a job. I says, "How many women working down there in Decatur?" He says, "About 65, 75." I says, "How many men?" He says, "You'll be the only one." I says, "I'll take the job." (Both laugh). So I did, and then she had--the boss lady had an iron down there and an ironing board, and I washed my clothes because I wasn't--I started at 77 ½ cents an hour, and (unclear) they paid in the war zone, 67 ½ cents (unclear), and minimum wage was 40 cents an hour then. Lena was working there, making less than \$16.00 a week, and living with a woman that works there, and she paid her \$12.00 for room and board, but

she had to buy her own dinner, so she had nothing left, hardly, from her check. By paying that lady \$12.00 for breakfast and lodging at night, that's the way the time was. But soda water was a nickel and hamburgers were a dime; some places you could get it for a nickel, and things like that. So, I was pressing out there one time, Saturday, and I was getting a little overtime, because I was the janitor, too, not only a mechanic but a janitor. It was time and a half, so I made a little extra money there, and washed my own clothes, and was ironing over there. Each restroom over there, he had a couch and if a lady got sick, she could lay down over there in the restroom at these places. I was there by myself, playing the radio real smooth, and had the front locked and everything, and nobody there, and enjoying the quiet and peace. Somebody hollered, "Hey, Frank!" Well, it come out of that restroom out there. I went up; it was that man came back. (Unclear) told me he changes the lock; whenever somebody quits, they change the locks on the front door. Since it was the lady's husband, he didn't change it. He came in drunk; he was a drunkard. He came in drunk and laid out on that ladies' restroom couch. He already knew about me (unclear). The first thing he asked me; I was stepping in the door there, and he was way over here. I didn't know if somebody was going to rob me there or what. "So what do you think about my old lady?" I says, "What old lady?" (Laughs). I says, "Well, I don't know which way you mean it." So I says, "She's been nice to me. She's telling me how to do things over here that I didn't know and otherwise I'd just get to learn myself." So, he didn't mean no harm, but I don't know whether they got back together or not, but I didn't stay there too long. I stayed there a little over a year, and I went to work for him in his Dallas place. He had three places in Dallas.

Mr. Zambrano:

When did you retire?

Mr. Nemeč: Well, I ain't retired yet; I'm still working.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, you're still working?

Mr. Nemeč: No, I'm not working. I'm working for myself. I know what you mean. Let's see, when was it; 1979 I believe.

Mr. Zambrano: So you still fix sewing machines?

Mr. Nemeč: Well, it seems like they work too good. I lost my wife 15 years ago. I had a cook; she could cook, and now I have to do a lot of cooking for myself. I done gave up my car. How am I going to ask; everybody always say, me and her go out to eat sometimes, and my sons, we go out and eat sometimes but that's not every day. So I spend a lot of time cooking for myself. They want me to go to the slab, where the old people, they bring food from Waco down there and you pay \$2.00 now. It used to be \$1.50. They asked me when I'm going to come down there and eat with them. I says, "When I get old." (Both laugh). Because I'm on a diet; there's some things I don't like. I can make a--maybe now since Waco, they might be have a better cook, but when they had the cooks, local cooks down there, they fixed a hamburger; I could fix a hamburgers better blindfolded. Then we got domino games at my house now, and that highly keeps your mind occupied; keeps you from getting the Alzheimer's, keeps your mind active. I exercise every morning and I do chop around my flower beds and what have you. I've got a garden; my sons plow it for me, and I helped them plant it and tell them how to plant it, and this and that, and keep busy.

Mr. Zambrano: How many children do you have?

Mr. Nemeč: I had four, but we lost one, premature. I was 39 when I married, and my wife was 32. Neither one of us was married. The youngest one is about 53--52 I believe, maybe.

Mr. Zambrano: Well, I think that covers everything. Well, sir, on behalf of the Museum and myself, I just want to say thank you for your service, and thanks for making time for me today. I appreciate it.

Mr. Nemec: Well, I appreciate you coming, and I wish I could show you a lot of things I think you'd be interested in. A lot of these things in large pictures--this neighbor over here, see I was selling these pictures. I was selling these official war photo pictures. This is my album right here.

Mr. Zambrano: I was looking at it earlier.

Mr. Nemec: Now I've got a lot of these if you want one.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, sure!

Mr. Nemec: That's the poem there that the tank riders wrote. That's one of the greatest poems this schoolteacher told me that she ever heard.

Mr. Zambrano: Now these are the light tanks.

Mr. Nemec: That's Guadalcanal, those light tanks. See, I was selling these pictures here to make money. I hired a guy named Grady. He was with the Barnum and Bailey; he was 18 years old. He was in the hospital, and I told him to come and help me sell those pictures. (Unclear) about two blocks from the hospital was retired from the Marine Corps, War II, and he had a room full of pictures. He wanted me to sell them and give me a commission of 1/3. I couldn't carry that many pictures. I knew what division's coming in, so he helped me. We sold for four and one half hours; we made around \$150.00 clear. I promised him \$2.50 an hour, and he could make only 87 ½ in the war zone. So I gave hm—I bought him some beer and a T-bone steak (Mr. Zambrano laughs) and gave him \$2.50. I went to get a shave; one time I got a shave in there, downtown it's 75 cents. I says, "I'm going dancing tonight, and you go where you want to go." That's when I danced with Lucille Ball that night. The man shaved me, and I gave him a dollar, and he wouldn't give me change. I says, "Where's my

change?" He says, "Servicemen it's a dollar." I says, "Where's your sign here?" He says he don't have one. I says, "You're a discriminator, that's all you are." I says, "I ought to just turn you in," but I says. "I ain't got time to mess with you." I says, "I'm not going to mess around with..." And this is part of it.

Mr. Zambrano: Did you take these pictures?

Mr. Nemec: These are official war photos. It was 20 in a pack for \$1.20, and I got 1/3 profit. This is the way we approached in those boats, going under fire, to Peleliu.

Mr. Zambrano: That's where you had to take the walk.

Mr. Nemec: I got them enlarged, most of these.

Mr. Zambrano: Do you remember bloody battle, or what was it called--Battle of Bloody Ridge?

Mr. Nemec: Where at, on Peleliu? Or Okinawa?

Mr. Zambrano: No, I think that was--no, Guadalcanal, I'm sorry. I saw bloody here and I thought--I was thinking the wrong one. I'm sorry. Oh, so this is you in this picture.

Mr. Nemec: (Chuckles) Yeah. Well, yeah. I could show you something better than that.

Mr. Zambrano: When you were on Peleliu, did the battalion lose a lot of tanks? I'm sorry, not Peleliu, Okinawa.

Mr. Nemec: We lost a lot of tanks on Okinawa; we lost a lot of tanks on Peleliu. We didn't lose many on New Britain.

OH04505 - Frank J. Nemec

Transcribed by: Joel Keefer

Fredericksburg, TX

March 15, 2021