

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. Donald G. “Mac” McWilliams

Date of Interview: January 24, 2017

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Interview in progress.

Ed Metzler: This is Ed Metzler. Today is the 24th of January, 2017. I am at the Nimitz Museum in Fredericksburg, Texas, and I am interviewing Mr. Mac McWilliams. 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.

So Mac, thanks for coming in from your home in Bourne to sit with us and share your World War II experiences. I’d like to get started by having you introduce yourself, and give us your full name, date and place of birth and we’ll take it from there.

Mr. McWilliams: Fine. Ed, thank you. My name is Mac McWilliams, actually my name is Donald G. but people call me Mac. And I was born on May the 23rd, 1925, and I was born in Ballinger, Texas. My folks had been ranchers up until ... 1924, sold the ranch, Dad was elected Sheriff, we came into Ballinger. I was born there in ... in Ballinger and we moved into jail and spent about six years there. So, that ... little bit about ... where I was ...

Ed Metzler: So, you had some jail time from early on in your life (laughter).

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah, I ... and when I joined the Marine Corps ...

Ed Metzler: (Chuckles)

Mr. McWilliams: ... the ... the officer or ... or the Sergeant that was signing me up said, “Have you ever spent any time in ... in jail?” And I said, “Yes sir.”

Ed Metzler: (Laughter)

Mr. McWilliams: And he said, “How many years?” And I said, “Six.”

Ed Metzler: (Laughter)

Mr. McWilliams: He said, “Well, you’re only seventeen, so what ... what ... what the hell happened?”

Ed Metzler: What did you do? (laughter)

Mr. McWilliams: And I laughed real big; I thought it was funny and told him that Dad was Sheriff, but he didn’t laugh at all (chuckles), so ... so I wondered if I was joining the right outfit.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, right up front!

Mr. McWilliams: Right up front.

Ed Metzler: They seem awfully serious (laughter).

Mr. McWilliams: He did!

Ed Metzler: So, I’m trying to remember ... I don’t know ... my geography’s not that good. Where is Ballinger in Texas?

Mr. McWilliams: It’s in west Texas and its west of ... uh, San Angelo; it’s in the San Angelo area.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mr. McWilliams: That’s Tom Green County.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. McWilliams: And Ballinger’s in the ... Runnels County.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mr. McWilliams: So, they adjoin each other.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, alright. Six years in jail and (laughter) ...

Mr. McWilliams: My younger brother was born in jail (laughter).

Ed Metzler: Oh, my goodness! And so, how many siblings ... did you have?

Mr. McWilliams: Well, there was ten of us altogether.

Ed Metzler: Oh, my word! Ten children!

Mr. McWilliams: Five ... five boys and five girls. And ... I’m very proud to say that ... during World War II there were ... five of us ... there was ... that served in the military. I had ... four brothers ... I had a sister that was in the WACs.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: So, we had ... all the branches represented in ...

Ed Metzler: Boy, you guys did more than your part.

Mr. McWilliams: Well, yeah and Mom was very proud of the flag that she had in the front window with the star feature on it, and I can't ... I can't talk about my brothers without mentioning the fact that ... I had a brother in the Navy who won the Silver Star; had a brother ... that was in the Army who won the Sil ... Silver Star; he's buried in Anzio ... and ... be killed (unintelligible). So, out of the five of us, two won the Silver Star. That's pretty un ... unusual.

Ed Metzler: That is ... pretty darned remarkable.

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah, sir.

Ed Metzler: I agree with you.

Mr. McWilliams: And ... if we have time, it ... its all related, I'd love to tell you about my brother that ... that was killed in Italy ... how some of that went about.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mr. McWilliams: And then ... I had a sister in the WACs and other brother in the Army.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: So, we had ... all the ... the forces represented.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, and your ... and your father ... was Sheriff, is that what you said?

Mr. McWilliams: He was Sheriff in ... Runnels County, Ballinger.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: And ... back whenever ... in those days, that was in the 1930s ...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: The Rangers, Texas Rangers, were appointed by the Governor; they served at the Governor's ... permission, you might say.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: Every new Governor came in, they'd fire the Rangers and brought in another one. And after Dad was the Sheriff, he became a Texas Ranger, and is very ... he was ... chosen as the most typical Texas Ranger.

Ed Metzler: Hum!

Mr. McWilliams: He was long, tall ...

Ed Metzler: (Chuckle)

Mr. McWilliams: ... heavy looking guy. He was ... he was thin, but when he looked in your eye, you knew he was a Ranger; you could tell right away.

Ed Metzler: Did he wear a white hat?

Mr. McWilliams: He ... he wore a white hat.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter), that's great, that's great!

Mr. McWilliams: And he was tough.

Ed Metzler: And your ... and your mother ... being a mother of ten children, I'll bet I know what she did for a living; she ran the household and had her hands full, didn't she?

Mr. McWilliams: Not only that, but when we lived in the jail, Mom was the ... we ... I don't know whether they still call them that way or not, but they called them a "jailer" and ... Mom was the one that ... went up and prepared the meals and went up and gave the food to all the prisoners on ... up in the cells, and they really loved Mom, all the prisoners. They would ... no one would dare touch her. I mean, she could walk into a ... a cell and they wouldn't bother her. Now Dad ... was a different story. If he got on the floor, if they could kill him, they would.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. McWilliams: They tried it more than once.

Ed Metzler: Is that right? My god.

Mr. McWilliams: But Mom was a wonderful, wonderful person.

Ed Metzler: Yeah. So ... so you went to ... to school in Ballinger ... only?

Mr. McWilliams: The first grade.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mr. McWilliams: But then ... we moved ... when Dad became a Ranger, we moved to ... to Austin, and Governor Sterling was the Ranger, uh, was the Governor at that time. Dad was in and out of the Rangers quite a few number of times. Just like I said a minute ago, each Governor that comes in ...

Ed Metzler: It was an appoint ... appointment ...

Mr. McWilliams: ... only the (unintelligible).

Ed Metzler: ... position, yeah.

Mr. McWilliams: So, we ... moved ... incidentally, Maggie and I have moved fifty-two times.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter), that's a long ... that's a *lot* of moves! (laughter)

Mr. McWilliams: That's a lot of moves. But we moved a lot when Dad was a Ranger ...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: ... because he was transferred from one town to the ... another.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: He was the Sheriff, the Deputy Sheriff.

Ed Metzler: So, where'd you go to school?

Mr. McWilliams: Well, I went to school ... in ... in Ballinger, in Austin, in Midland, Big Lake, San Angelo, Lubbock, back to Austin, Ozona.

Ed Metzler: You never could really put your roots down, could you ...

Mr. McWilliams: Never could.

Ed Metzler: ... from being a, you know, a student.

Mr. McWilliams: But, that brings up a point that I'd like to ... just mention. In the fifty-two times that we moved ... was ... part of that was, of course, was Maggie and our kids. I thought it was the most wonderful thing, and they would admit ... ad ... admit, too, right now ... moving helped them because you never met a stranger. If we moved into a town, they became ... they became a friend, not just an acquaintance, but a friend. And to this day, they walk into a room of strangers, and they walk out of ... with a room of friends.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum, that's ... yeah, they learned ... to integrate quickly ...

Mr. McWilliams: Yes, and they ... they did.

Ed Metzler: ... and to ... and to make contact with people.

Mr. McWilliams: They did.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, yeah. So, when you actually graduated from high school, where were you?

Mr. McWilliams: Ozona.

Ed Metzler: Okay, so you were a ...

Mr. McWilliams: In 1942.

Ed Metzler: ... graduate of ... okay. And so, if you ... and ... and that was in '42 you say?

Mr. McWilliams: Right.

Ed Metzler: So, the war started while you were still in high school.

Mr. McWilliams: Still in high school.

Ed Metzler: Tell me about ... December the 7th and what you remember.

Mr. McWilliams: I was working in a drug store; they had two drug stores in Ozona. They were side by side, small town; it was the richest little town. They called it “The Richest Little Town in the World,” friendliest little town in the world. They had two drug stores and I was working ... during school to make enough money. Back then, you know, money was pretty tough to come by.

Ed Metzler: Yep, yeah, it was the Depression.

Mr. McWilliams: And so I was working in the drug store on December the 7th ... 1941.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: I remember it very well.

Ed Metzler: So, did you get it what ... radio or somebody came by and ...

Mr. McWilliams: Radio.

Ed Metzler: ... ran off the streets and said ...

Mr. McWilliams: Radio. So, didn’t have television back then.

Ed Metzler: I understand.

Mr. McWilliams: So, it was word of mouth or ... or ... or radio.

Ed Metzler: So, what changed for you when the war started, if anything?

Mr. McWilliams: Well, my life changed because I became part of World War II. And ... by the time I joined, my brother was in the Navy and my other brothers had already joined.

Ed Metzler: So, they were older than you.

Mr. McWilliams: They were older than I am. I was the next to the youngest.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mr. McWilliams: And my youngest brother later became a Marine, but he was not in World War II.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: But ... six of us were in the service (unintelligible) and ... and World War II. So, my life changed because they were ... they had ... joined up, every one of them had volunteered. And, Ed, in those days, it was ... you were ashamed if you were 4-F; you wanted to fight, you wanted to join. And ...

Ed Metzler: Being 4-F was a problem rather than a benefit?

Mr. McWilliams: You better believe it. And people ...

Ed Metzler: I understand.

Mr. McWilliams: ... didn't leave the United States to go to Canada or somewhere like that to escape ... going into the service; they *wanted* to be a servant. So, my life changed considerably as it did for Mom and Dad.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum. So, did you experience ... rationing and those kinds of things almost immediately or ... could you tell the difference on something like that?

Mr. McWilliams: I couldn't ... because back then we didn't have a hell of a lot.

Ed Metzler: (Chuckles)

Mr. McWilliams: So, we didn't miss a lot.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter), right!

Mr. McWilliams: We didn't ... we didn't have a thing that they cut out. You know, I do remember ... that we had the gasoline ration.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: But also remember ... this was in 1943 for mostly my account of the war. I remember that ... women's hoses were ... were rationed; you couldn't get that. And there was ... some food articles, but we were not hurt by it.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum. Probably less impact when you're out there ... kind of in the country and people raise a lot of their own stuff locally, and that kind of thing.

Mr. McWilliams: Absolutely, yeah.

Ed Metzler: You graduated from high school; did you go immediately into the military or ...

Mr. McWilliams: No, I went ...

Ed Metzler: What did you do?

Mr. McWilliams: ... I went to Texas Tech.

Ed Metzler: Okay, so you started ... to school, okay.

Mr. McWilliams: Started to ... started to school. And ... I was seventeen, and when I came around to the first semester, I ... by then I really wanted to join the service,

and I wanted to join the Marines ... rather than the Army. I kind of had the idea that the Marines were the toughest, best bunch, and that's what I wanted. That's why I joined the Marine Corps.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: So, I joined the Marines when I was ... I had to get my parents' permission ... in 1943 for them to ... let me join at the age of seventeen.

Ed Metzler: So, you weren't eighteen yet then?

Mr. McWilliams: Not eighteen yet.

Ed Metzler: Okay, so ... you ... what'd you go in ... in February?

Mr. McWilliams: March.

Ed Metzler: March of ... '4 ...

Mr. McWilliams: March the 23rd, 1943.

Ed Metzler: So, where did you actually go down and sign up ... in ...

Mr. McWilliams: In Lubbock, Texas.

Ed Metzler: In Lubbock.

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: Okay, 'cause you were up in school.

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: Up there in Lubbock, that's right.

Mr. McWilliams: And ... that brings up a very interesting point. There was six of us that joined the Marines together ... or joined the service. Well, joined ... we knew we were going in the Marines, so there was six of us that actually joined the Marines together. And one of the stories that I've written, Never Too Old to Cry, is the story about the six of us ... how we go through the war, what we do, how we love, how we fight, how we lived, and ... not all of them made it back.

Ed Metzler: Uhm, so you went in; where'd they send you to boot camp?

Mr. McWilliams: Went to San Diego.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: And ... we went by train, actually we went by bus ... from Lubbock to El Paso, and then we got on a troop train.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: When we got to El Paso, they put us on a train and we went from ... from El Paso to San Diego, and that's where I went ... to boot camp.

Ed Metzler: So, let me see if I've got this right. You're seventeen years old, you've probably never been out of Texas, and now all of a sudden, you're on a troop train headed to the west coast to go fight a war. What's going through your mind; what are you thinking?

Mr. McWilliams: I was ... I guess I was thinking about ... I'm ... I'm anxious to get ... get in the war and whip the Japs, and that's what everyone of us were thinking, I'm sure.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: And ... I was young; I was in great physical shape 'cause I'd played football ...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: ... in high school and played football in ... Texas Tech. So, when I got to San Diego, I went into boot camp there, and it was pretty tough for most of the guys, wasn't as tough for me because I was in such good, physical shape.

Ed Metzler: You were ... in shape.

Mr. McWilliams: And I was young!

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. McWilliams: Seventeen years old ... eighteen ...

Ed Metzler: Seventeen and ...

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: ... football ... tough.

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah, football tough.

Ed Metzler: So, what was the hardest part about ... boot camp?

Mr. McWilliams: Well, for me, none of it was real hard. For some of the others, some of the long marches and training ... was hard. But I ... as I look back on it now, none of it was real tough for me 'cause I was in ... I was in ... damned good

shape. Uh, the food was wonderful! I mean, I'd never eaten food like ... like they served at the Marine Corps.

Ed Metzler: Really?!

Mr. McWilliams: People didn't have a lot to eat.

Ed Metzler: That's true.

Mr. McWilliams: But the Marine Corps ... fed us, and it was family-style.

Ed Metzler: Three meals a day, all you need, all you wanted, huh?

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah, and you better eat everything you put on your plate!

Ed Metzler: (Laughter)

Mr. McWilliams: They made you do that.

Ed Metzler: So, California is a bit different than Texas.

Mr. McWilliams: A hell of a lot!

Ed Metzler: Yeah (laughter), in so many ways! What was your impression of California? I mean, did you get liberty and ... able to go into town or what?

Mr. McWilliams: While we were in boot camp, we ... we couldn't go to ... on liberty. And our ... our platoon ... I was in Platoon 284, and my platoon was ... about ... uh, oh, I'd say the second or third past the time ... that we could take liberty. Up until then, when you went through boot camp, you went ... immediately into a ... your training. If you were sent to a special school, you were, but about two or three platoons before I got ... out of boot camp, they started to giving liberty.

Ed Metzler: Hum!

Mr. McWilliams: And ... one of the things that I remember about going on liberty was ... going to the Hollywood Thea ... Hollywood Theater (chuckles) ...

Ed Metzler: Yeah?

Mr. McWilliams: ... where the strip ... you said ... something different about Texas? I'd never seen a naked woman before (laughter).

Ed Metzler: But you did there!

Mr. McWilliams: But I did there (laughter).

Ed Metzler: (Laughter)

Mr. McWilliams: I thought it wasn't too bad (laughter).

Ed Metzler: Yeah, why ... maybe this California is not so bad after all! (chuckles)

Mr. McWilliams: This Marine Corps stuff is alright!

Ed Metzler: And just seventeen years old, too (laughter). You were impressionable; let's just put it that way (laughter).

Mr. McWilliams: I was, I was at that.

Ed Metzler: So, what ... eight weeks boot camp?

Mr. McWilliams: Eight-week boot camp.

Ed Metzler: And then what?

Mr. McWilliams: Uh, there was ... there was two people that were very famous ... back then, people don't remember them now, but Tyrone Power ... ever heard of ... he was a movie star?

Ed Metzler: Yep!

Mr. McWilliams: And ... there was another movie star that I ... Bill Hadden (sp?), I think his name was; he was in two platoons right ... about the same time I was. So, when we finished boot camp, uh, and they were coming through just as fast as they could re ... recruit or ... or get them to sign up, they ... we went into special training, and some of them went directly into the ... Air Corps, I mean, uh, trained to be a ... pilot, some of them trained ... infantry. I was sent to Quartermaster School and where I was trained in ... in ... business work. I didn't use it after I got overseas, but that was the special training.

Ed Metzler: And where was that?

Mr. McWilliams: The ... it was there at ... San Diego.

Ed Metzler: So, it was right there?

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: They didn't send you off to somewhere?

Mr. McWilliams: No. It was ... we had what was called the Recruit Depot where we to ... to camp.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: And there was a camp called Camp Elliott, and that was the camp that I was in when I did the special training.

Ed Metzler: How long ...

Mr. McWilliams: They had another camp called Matthews which was our rifle range.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: So, while we were on boot camp, we also went to Camp Matthews to learn more about using weapons and ... make sure that we knew how to ... hit the target which we ... we learned.

Ed Metzler: And ... after that, did you then go ... overseas?

Mr. McWilliams: I did. We were ... I was ... uh, part of the ... what was called the 27th Replacement Battalion.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mr. McWilliams: And ... we were boarded ship; the ship name is ... as I best recall was ... Rambo ...

Ed Metzler: Spell that.

Mr. McWilliams: Rocha ... [USS] Rochambeau.

Ed Metzler: Rochambeau.

Mr. McWilliams: Rochambeau.

Ed Metzler: I have heard of that; that was a ... like a French liner or something wasn't it ...

Mr. McWilliams: It was.

Ed Metzler: ... that was converted?

Mr. McWilliams: You're ... absolutely.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum, uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: Its exactly what it was.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum, uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: And ... we left the States on October the 23rd, 1943.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: And ...

Ed Metzler: From San Diego?

Mr. McWilliams: From San Diego.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: And our destination was ... uh, New Caledonia. That was kind of the grouping area for all the ... the Marines that left out of San Diego and ... I'm

sure, out of Parris Island. But ... New Caledonia was where we went to, and I was there for ... uh, maybe a month. And ...

Ed Metzler: So, New Caledonia, is that close to New Guinea down there?

Mr. McWilliams: Yes, it is.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mr. McWilliams: Absolutely!

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: In fact, New Guinea was the next place that we went to.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, that was the next stop, huh?

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah. And that was ... uh, when we went to New Guinea, we were assigned the outfits that we were ... served with, and ...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: ... and I was assigned to the Fifth Infantry Regiment of the First Marine Division, and we went to Milne Bay on New Guinea ... Infantry Regiment.

Ed Metzler: Infantry ...

Mr. McWilliams: Fifth Infantry Regiment.

Ed Metzler: ... Regiment.

Mr. McWilliams: You know, Ed, in the ...

Ed Metzler: Of the First Marines?

Mr. McWilliams: First Marine Division.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: First Marine Division, of course, had the Fifth and the Seventh and the First.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: Those were the Infantry Division. And they had the Seventeenth which was Artillery. And then they had ... I don't remember what the other one ... what the other division was ... or regiment was.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: But the ... the six of us that joined the Marines together ... most of us went into the Fifth Regiment. Two of them, a guy by the name of Billy Harrell (sp?) ... I'll talk about him later.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: Billy Harrell and ... a guy by the name of Donald Woods went to the Seventh Regiment; we were ... were all ... assigned to the First Marine Division.

Ed Metzler: Now, the First Marine Division ... had been to Guadalcanal, correct?

Mr. McWilliams: Been to Guadalcanal, and when ...

Ed Metzler: And Guadalcanal was ... basically over when you guys got there, right?

Mr. McWilliams: Yes, exactly right.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mr. McWilliams: I was not part of the Guadalcanal ... Guadalcanal group. Those Marines, after Guadalcanal ... was tough, but ... and they deserved the rest that was ... they were given; they were sent to Australia.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: And they stayed there and regrouped and retrained.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: Then they went to New Guinea, and that's where I joined them. So, I joined them when the First Marine Division left Guadalcanal, I mean, Australia ...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: ... and went to New Guinea.

Ed Metzler: So, by then did ... had they adopted the Waltzing Matilda as the ...

Mr. McWilliams: It was it!

Ed Metzler: Yeah, 'cause they picked that up in Australia.

Mr. McWilliams: They sing it ... we did.

Ed Metzler: Yeah (chuckle).

Mr. McWilliams: Beautiful song.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, it is, I agree with you.

Mr. McWilliams: And yeah, we ... we ... we all got together. Now aft ... now, I'm going to go ahead a little bit from there. After we got to ... New Guinea, we ... the First Marine Division started training for their second ... Guadalcanal was the first, the second one was Cape Gloucester on New Britain.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: So, we started training on New Guinea for the Invasion of New Britain.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum, uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: And ... we left ... New Guinea for New Britain on December ... landed there on December the 25th, Christmas Day.

Ed Metzler: So, you had ... couple, well, you ... I don't know, it took you what ... three weeks just to get to ... from the U.S. by slow boat or maybe this wasn't a slow boat (unintelligible).

Mr. McWilliams: It was pretty slow.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter), so you were ... what ... four to six weeks there ... at Cape Gloucester before you ... you left or ...

Mr. McWilliams: No, not at Cape Gloucester; that's where we ...

Ed Metzler: New Caledonia, I'm sorry.

Mr. McWilliams: New Caledonia, yeah.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: What was ... what was it like there? I mean, tropical?

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah. It was very close to Guadalcanal, and you've seen pictures of ...

Ed Metzler: Oh yeah, yeah.

Mr. McWilliams: ... of the coconut trees and the ...

Ed Metzler: Yeah, and the mosquitos and

Mr. McWilliams: ... and the jungles and mosquitos.

Ed Metzler: ... and ... the mosquito netting and the dinky fever.

Mr. McWilliams: And the mosquito netting.

Ed Metzler: And ...

Mr. McWilliams: Uh, New Britain, that's where I became acquainted with the alligators and the new ... the dinky fever and the ...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: ... mosquitos, sleeping in hammocks and so forth, but ...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: ... we trained on ... on New Guinea, we went on New Britain, Caledonia.

Ed Metzler: So, you in tents or you in barracks ... what?

Mr. McWilliams: Tents.

Ed Metzler: Tents?

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: Miserable?

Mr. McWilliams: Do what now?

Ed Metzler: Is it miserable there? Was it?

Mr. McWilliams: Terribly so. It was *hot*. And ... when we landed on New Britain, uh, New Britain wasn't anywhere near as difficult as Guadalcanal or ... later Peleliu.

Ed Metzler: Uhm!

Mr. McWilliams: And Okinawa.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, those are ... rough.

Mr. McWilliams: So, a lot of the ... lot of the First Marine Division people ... after Guadalcanal were sent home. And then if they made it through Cape Gloucester, most of them were sent home. So ... but they ... we ... uh, I remember so well about ... New Britain. It was a ... it was a place ... where ... it rained every single day. There wasn't a day that went by ... that it didn't rain. And I don't mean ... mist, I mean, rain, pouring down rain! So, we Marines had to be cognizant of snakes and alligators and ... snipers in the trees. Seems ... seems to me like ... I saw more Japanese soldiers in the trees than I did on the ground ...

Ed Metzler: Uhm.

Mr. McWilliams: ... in Cape Gloucester.

Ed Metzler: So, what ... did you go in on landing craft?

Mr. McWilliams: Landing craft, uh hum.

Ed Metzler: Were you one of the early ones going in?

Mr. McWilliams: Well, I wasn't necessarily the first wave in my ... my group, but you know, people say, "Well, I went on the first wave ... wave meaning ... that ... that was the toughest wave to go in. It really wasn't because most places that we went into, and I'll get a little bit more into that as we go into the ... later part of the war, but when you went in, the Japanese ... while ... during the invasions that the Marines had in the Gilberts and Marianas ... Guadalcanal,

Guam ... those places ... the Japanese met you at the shore; they tried to ... keep you from landing. So, the first wave was ... they ... you caught hell.

Ed Metzler: The tough ones, yeah.

Mr. McWilliams: They caught hell. But also, once they couldn't keep you from coming in, they moved further back inland, and we were bringing in supplies. So, what they tried to do with their mortars and things of that nature was to destroy ... the supply ... the supplies that we had. So, it wasn't ... I mean, the ... the third and fourth wave ... got hit pretty hard, too. So, it was ...

Ed Metzler: Yeah, I think that was particularly true in Iwo and Okinawa ...

Mr. McWilliams: In Peleliu.

Ed Metzler: ... they would let you in ...

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: ... almost and then ...

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: ... wanted to nail you once you were ashore.

Mr. McWilliams: Right.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: Were you ... an infantryman at this point when you were going in?

Mr. McWilliams: No, I was in ... well, I was in H&S headquarters and Supply Company.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mr. McWilliams: And my ... my duties, uh, on the various invasions ...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: ... was working with the ammunition and weapons. Uh, we would ... commandeer, uh trucks, load them with ammunition as they called for them from the front and we took this ... the ammunition and the weapons ... up to the front lines. So ...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: ... we ... we got ... the ... the supplies in from the ship to the shore ...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: ... and then we got the ... supplies, the weapons and ammunition ... got it up to the front.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: So, I wasn't ... in the infantry.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: But ... I saw many, many people killed. I had ... I had flesh blown ... with mortars hitting ... near where I was ... blowing flesh ... Marine buddies of mine ... all over me, so it was ... you ... you were not safe ... simply because you ...

Ed Metzler: It's the real deal, huh?

Mr. McWilliams: ... were not in ... it was the real deal.

Ed Metzler: Uhm, uhm, uhm! So, you had mentioned you saw more Japanese ... in the trees than you did on the ground which implies snipers, of course.

Mr. McWilliams: Snipers, of course.

Ed Metzler: So, tell me about the snipers and what you experienced there.

Mr. McWilliams: Well, the snipers ... they Japanese had ... had ... two ... I think two-toed shoes. And I don't know whether you've ever seen it or not, but it's a ... kind of a ... slipper, and its ... its two-toed.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: and it's great for climbing trees ... that's used ... that ... the Japanese wore them all the time, but it was great for ... climbing the trees. So, before we got there, before we landed, a lot of the Japanese climbed the trees and ... got up among where the leaves and all the foliage was the thickest, and that's where they were whenever we came ashore. And ... so, a Marine would fall and you'd look around, "Where in the hell does that shot come from?!" And took us a little while ... to recognize that we were being ... if you looked up, you saw some of the Japanese hiding in the trees, snipers picking us off if they could.

Ed Metzler: Uhm!

Mr. McWilliams: Of course, they were ahead of us, but it was raining and muddy and sloshed around, it was ... it was pretty miserable.

Ed Metzler: Did you have ... by that point, some close buddies that you had developed a relationship with, you know, the band of brothers ...

Mr. McWilliams: Yes.

Ed Metzler: ... phenomenon?

Mr. McWilliams: Yes. The closest friends that I had were ... part of the Sixth that we joined together.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: There's four of us went to the ... Fifth Regiment, and I was made ... quite good friends with them, and then ... some of the other Marines that ... were in our outfit, a lot of them. I can remember a lot of them ... and in my story that I've written, I don't call anybody by their real name. Like ... I refer to a guy by the name of Boog (sp?), actually his name was Booger (sp?), his last ... last name was Martin. And I ... one of the guy's name that I mentioned, his name was Woods; I call him Woodson. A guy by the name of Harrell, I called him Harris. The guy whose name was ... Queen, I called him King. So, I played off of those. In ... in fact ...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: ... in my book, my last name is McWilliams, but in the book, I'm the Marine that is Mac Williams. The friend's name ... that ... that we had ... you asked if I'd made any friends ... uh, we were all ... pretty close ... knit group together.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: And there was just a bunch of them that never made it back. But ... and I ... I sometimes wrote letters to the parents of those who were killed.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum. That's not an easy thing.

Mr. McWilliams: Its not an easy thing at all. And ... one of the guys that joined with me ... who was killed on Peleliu ... he was ... he was my best friend and he ... that was ... that was probably the saddest, toughest ... moment that I had ...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: ... was knowing that he got killed.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, Peleliu was a mess, I know that. So, how long ... how long did the ... Cape Gloucester, New Britain ...

Mr. McWilliams: How long did it last?

Ed Metzler: ... campaign last for you guys?

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: How long were you there?

Mr. McWilliams: Uh, went in on December the 25th and 26th.

Ed Metzler: Christmas Day.

Mr. McWilliams: And it was ... that's right. And it was not secured until April.

Ed Metzler: Uhm.

Mr. McWilliams: And so, uh, there was another ... another little invasion that part of the Fifth Regiment made, and it was only the Fifth Regiment out of the First Marine Division that ... made the one that we're going to talk about ... a place called Talasea, T-a-l-a-s-e-a, and it's a ... it a ... Marine base, I mean, a Japanese base on the north end of ... Cape Gloucester, New Britain. So, that ... that took some time. And after, I guess, it was the end of April when New Britain was ... declared secure.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: We were sent to ... we thought ... some of us may ... go to a rest camp, and we thought it might even go back to Australia where we'd come from, but that wasn't the case. We went to a place in the Russell Islands called Pavuvu. And any Marine in the First Marine Division ... will remember Pavuvu. We had to carve out ... our rest camp; we didn't go there to rest ... immediately, we went there to make a camp ... where we could ...

Ed Metzler: Went there to build one (laughter).

Mr. McWilliams: ... where we could rest.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, I've heard of Pavuvu.

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: I've heard of ... Mog Mog, too, which some R&R camp that ... they ... that the forces in the Pacific used to ... but Pavuvu you built a camp there.

Mr. McWilliams: We built a camp there, and it was ... they had land crabs as big as a ... baseball, some of them as big as a Stetson hat I guess.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter)

Mr. McWilliams: And ... and they were everywhere. But we ... we carved in between ... and it rained a lot ... rained a lot for us there on Pavuvu. But in between rains, we were able to make a pretty decent rest camp.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: And that's where we stayed, and when you're in a rest camp after you go in ... from an invasion, you not only ... not only go into rest ... but you also go in to train ... for the next invasion.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: And our next one was Peleliu.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: And that was in September ... the 15th of 1944.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: So, we were on Pavuvu up until ... about ...

Ed Metzler: So, it's a mixed ... feeling there. You're there to kind of get some R&R, but ... you're training for the next one that you know is coming.

Mr. McWilliams: Absolutely!

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: And Peleliu was ... was the next one for us.

Ed Metzler: Going back to Camp Gloucester, uh, campaign for a moment. What was your closest call there to ... your low point, your most dangerous ... experience?

Mr. McWilliams: Uh, I don't know that I could really ... recite the closest call. You were ... you were under fire, but, you know, you don't know how close you are. I will ... will say this, that one of ... one of the guys that joined had a mental breakdown on ... Cape Gloucester.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: Constant rain, under fire, difficult conditions ... was pretty tough for a lot of them to take. Some ... a lot them ... we call it ... nowadays we call it ... uh, you know, combat fatigue.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: And ... I guess that's what it ...

Ed Metzler: Back then what did they call it?

Mr. McWilliams: I think it was called combat fatigue back then.

Ed Metzler: Okay. Post-traumatic stress syndrome.

Mr. McWilliams: That's what they call it now.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. McWilliams: That's the word ... I was trying to ...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. McWilliams: ... think of. But its pretty much the same thing; its ...

Ed Metzler: Was it looked down upon by ... people, other people, when they saw something like that happen that maybe ... just wasn't a strong person or was trying to get out of ... combat?

Mr. McWilliams: You know, you know, it ... it's interesting that you asked that question because there was a little bit. There was sympathy, of course.

Ed Metzler: Yep!

Mr. McWilliams: Because you could see that the guy ... when he ... when he had a nervous breakdown, he was just a bowl of jelly.

Ed Metzler: He lost it, yeah.

Mr. McWilliams: He lost it.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: And its tough to see ... one of your buddies that way.

Ed Metzler: Yep!

Mr. McWilliams: But ... but then ... uh, I ... I don't ... I ... looking back on it, I don't see much ... much of ... anger or ... thinking that this guy is trying to get out of it. It was just something that happened and ...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: ... later on, after two or three invasions, why, some of the guys wanted to get out and they'd do almost anything ...

Ed Metzler: And shoot their toe off or something (chuckles).

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah. But ... but that was still early in the ... in the war.

Ed Metzler: What'd you think about ... who was your, you know, I promised you I wasn't going to ask a bunch of questions about ... remembering names, but who was your Commanding Officer when you went in ... on your first ... campaign at Camp Gloucester?

Mr. McWilliams: I cannot remember; isn't that something?

Ed Metzler: But ... was he ... somebody you had confidence in; did you ...

Mr. McWilliams: Yes.

Ed Metzler: ... indifferent to him, did you love him; tell me about ... emotion between you and your ... officers.

Mr. McWilliams: Before I answer that, let me tell you about ... three other leaders ...

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mr. McWilliams: ... that I had ... occasion to like or dislike.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mr. McWilliams: Those ... were DIs in boot camp, we had a Sergeant by the name of Jeffries (sp?).

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: He was tough as a boot. We had a Corporal by the name of Adams (sp?) and he was the one ... that was the toughest, but the one we respected the most.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: We had a PF ... Pfc ... called Myles (sp?) and he was a pussy cat. He was ... easy on us, but he was the one that we didn't like. We liked the guy that was the toughest.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: So, back to your question about Cape Gloucester. For the life of me, I cannot remember some of the officers' names that we had then.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, I wouldn't ... that's a long time ago (chuckles).

Mr. McWilliams: Over ... over seventy years ago.

Ed Metzler: I understand.

Mr. McWilliams: Seventy-three years ago.

Ed Metzler: I know.

Mr. McWilliams: Maybe ... maybe in a little bit, I might remember something.

Ed Metzler: That's fine. Well, I mean, you've already remem ...

Mr. McWilliams: One of them ... one of them's name was Williamson ... as Captain ... Captain Williamson.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: He was the direct guy over ... over our group.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. McWilliams: Now that I've mentioned it.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. McWilliams: Captain Williamson. And he was a very quiet type of a person. He was elderly, uh ...

Ed Metzler: What ... thirty? (laughter)

Mr. McWilliams: (Laughter), no ... thirty-two. (laughter)

Ed Metzler: (Laughter), he was an old gray beard.

Mr. McWilliams: Well, you know ...

Ed Metzler: (Laughter)

Mr. McWilliams: ... we had a ... we had a Marine that was twenty-eight; his name was Muenster (sp?), and we called him Pop.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter)

Mr. McWilliams: (Chuckles)

Ed Metzler: That kills me every time I hear that story. But the ... I ... I've heard it so many times (laughter).

Mr. McWilliams: I'll bet. We were ... well, we were all seventeen, eighteen ...

Ed Metzler: Well, yeah!

Mr. McWilliams: ... nineteen years old.

Ed Metzler: Oh, well look at a seventeen or eighteen-year-old kid today ...

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: ... and I go ... whoa, what a difference!

Mr. McWilliams: And ... you know, I ... you look at pictures. Our pictures ... with us, with beards, with a machine gun in our hand, raggedy clothes. I've got pictures of ... of me standing on top of Shuri Castle in Okinawa.

Ed Metzler: Really?!

Mr. McWilliams: And there's dead Japanese all ... all around us.

Ed Metzler: Oh, my lord!

Mr. McWilliams: And ... I was still only about eighteen, nineteen years old by the time we got there.

Ed Metzler: Isn't that something?

Mr. McWilliams: I'd look at some of the guys, some of the kids that are seventeen, eighteen years old and I wonder if they *could* have done ... if they could do the same things that we did. I ... I think they can, if they put their mind to it.

Ed Metzler: They just don't have to.

Mr. McWilliams: They don't have to.

Ed Metzler: That's ... the difference. And did you ... experience any ... banzai charges?

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: On Cape Gloucester?

Mr. McWilliams: Not ... not on Cape Gloucester.

Ed Metzler: So, that's coming later?

Mr. McWilliams: It's coming later.

Ed Metzler: Okay, good. Uh, so you did your R&R, you built the camp, you had some R&R at Pavuvu, and you trained for the next ... campaign, and it was the ... Peleliu.

Mr. McWilliams: Peleliu.

Ed Metzler: And ... when ...

Mr. McWilliams: September the 15th, 1944.

Ed Metzler: Tell me all about Peleliu.

Mr. McWilliams: Okay. That was in September of 1944. In the summer ... of 1944, MacArthur and Nimitz ... and Roosevelt met on Oahu, and they charted the course of the war. MacArthur wanted to take the Philippines and he also

wanted to take ... Ok ... Okinawa, but he also wanted to take Peleliu. Peleliu was off.

Ed Metzler: So, it'd protect the flank.

Mr. McWilliams: Exactly, while he went into the Philippines. Nimitz wanted to take Peleliu because of the ... entirely different reason; he wanted to go ... on up to Taiwan after Peleliu. MacArthur wanted to go through ...

Ed Metzler: Taiwan?

Mr. McWilliams: Taiwan. And ... uh, MacArthur wanted to take the Philippines, Okinawa and then on into ... into Japan. But ... Nimitz wanted to do ... the Peleliu. So, Mac ... uh, Roosevelt decided ... he would go with MacArthur's plans ... which was to take Peleliu, take Okinawa and then go on into ... landing on ... on Japan. So, Peleliu was ... was our destination.

Ed Metzler: (Unintelligible) as opposed to the island hopping route.

Mr. McWilliams: Right.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum. Well, he was an Army guy, so I guess you'd expect that, plus he had this thing in his craw about the Philippines and ... his returning.

Mr. McWilliams: I will return!

Ed Metzler: Yeah. What ... what was the opinion of MacArthur versus Nimitz ... amongst you guys?

Mr. McWilliams: A ... a world of difference. We had the highest respect for Nimitz.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: MacArthur we did not.

Ed Metzler: Why is that?

Mr. McWilliams: Uh, we called him Dug-out Doug.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter)

Mr. McWilliams: And that kind of ... the name kind of ... kind of gives you ...

Ed Metzler: Gives you some ... some insight.

Mr. McWilliams: Gives you an idea, yeah.

Ed Metzler: Yeah (laughter).

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah, he was a showman. I ... I think ... the Marines kind of resented some of the ... some of the Army that served in the ... you know, they served hard,

too. They lost a lot of people. I don't want to degrade the Army in the Pacific at all, but ... it ... you know, the Marines were the first in, and the Army came in afterwards. And our opinion of ... MacArthur was pretty much ... ole Dug-out Doug is coming back.

Ed Metzler: Did you work ... side by side with Army at all during any of your ... uh, campaigns?

Mr. McWilliams: I never ... I never did. The Army came in, but I was never associated with them.

Ed Metzler: 'Cause, I mean, they split the duty, I know, in Okinawa and I know they did in Peleliu as well.

Mr. McWilliams: That's right, but only after ... in Peleliu, they came in after the Marines had secured the island.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: Army did not come into Peleliu.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: I mentioned Billy Harrell, one of the guys that joined the Marine Corps with me.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: Uh, he was killed on Peleliu.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: And the Army ... was going to come in to take over our lines, and I saw Billy; he was in the Seventh, I was in the Fifth, and I saw Billy. We were coming off ... and he was ... they ... they already ... been pulled off the lines. The Army had gone in, the Japanese banzai attack occurred, they broke through the lines, they called for the Seventh Regiment to go back up on the line, and Billy was killed.

Ed Metzler: So, you see a connection there between the Army ... and ...

Mr. McWilliams: In a way.

Ed Metzler: ... in a way, and the death of your friend.

Mr. McWilliams: And I believe that was probably ... probably the hardest, saddest ... part of ... of the war.

Ed Metzler: I understand.

Mr. McWilliams: I lost some buddies, but ... he was the closest.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. McWilliams: I wrote a letter to ... to his mother. We didn't know ... at the time ... that he was killed because ... when I saw him, he was going to the ... down to the beach to board ship to go home ... go ... go to ... rest camp which was ... for the ... again.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: So, I thought he made it through, and it wasn't until after we left Peleliu ... and we went back to a rest camp which was Pavuvu again, and ... this buddy of mine, his name was Ike ... in fact, he's the only ... I ... only one other than myself out of the six of us ... that I've written about in my book. He and I are the only two that are left ... out of that group. And he and I went over to the Seventh Regiment where they were camped on Pavuvu, and I asked, you know, "Where's ... where's Billy Harrell's ... uh, camp? Does anybody know Billy Harrell?" They said, "Yeah, hell, he got killed." "Oh, he did?!" "He got killed on the last day." So, I have to look back on that as probably the toughest ... toughest part ... of the war. I lost other friends, but none of them as close as Billy.

Ed Metzler: Well, first ... he was close friend and then secondly, the odd ... circumstances ...

Mr. McWilliams: Uh, circumstances ... right.

Ed Metzler: ... that ... and how you found out makes it double hit.

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah. So, I wrote a (throat clearing) ... wrote a letter back to his mother, and (throat clearing) ... uh, told her about ... about him ... how he got killed, and she wrote back (throat clearing), and she said she had ... left his room as it was.

Ed Metzler: Uhm!

Mr. McWilliams: She had it decorated with ... American flag. I don't have that letter anymore; it was tough to write and tough to get ... word back from her that

... I was glad, of course, (throat clearing) she knew from my letter what had happened that ...

Ed Metzler: Where did he ... where did he live?

Mr. McWilliams: He lived in Canadian, Texas. In the book ... I don't have that as his ... home.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: But that was where ... his ... his home.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, it's up in the panhandle.

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah, it is. That's why, I guess, I was in Lubbock and why ... when he was recruited ... he ... he joined just like we did.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: Well, all of us were volunteers, none of us were drafted. But that's why ... that's how we became friends right away in ... in Lubbock.

Ed Metzler: So, let's go back to the Peleliu campaign. So, you're transported ... as part of an invasion force on troop carriers, I guess, or ...

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: ... LSTs or ...

Mr. McWilliams: Right.

Ed Metzler: ... what have you. Tell me about ... your experience going in.

Mr. McWilliams: Okay. Uh, they ... one of the ship's names and I don't remember ... whether it was the one that we were on when we went into Peleliu, but it was ... the [USS] Hayes, Presidential ... it had been an ocean liner, I think, and it was called the Hayes ... H-a-y-s [s/b Hayes].

Ed Metzler: 'Cause it ... the President line they called it.

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: And they had ships named after presidents.

Mr. McWilliams: Absolutely! And ... like I say, we went in on Peleliu on September the 15th.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: On the morning of September the 15th, when we were getting ready ... to go in ... uh, they called us down to chow ... breakfast is what they called it.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum, uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: And we were served ... spam and powdered eggs.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum (chuckle).

Mr. McWilliams: The powered eggs isn't much.

Ed Metzler: Uhm.

Mr. McWilliams: I'd ... I wouldn't touch them. Spam ... I still eat it today.

Ed Metzler: (Chuckles)

Mr. McWilliams: But we were served that as breakfast. And our Commanding Officer heard what we'd been served, and he went to the ship's Captain and told him to break out ... fresh eggs and steak ... that he wanted his men to be served eggs and steak ... that morning because he said, "It'll be the last meal ... that some of them will ever get."

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: So, we ate the second breakfast. And we crawled down nets from the ship to our landing craft. And I don't think ... I don't think they were ... uh, tanks, landing craft tanks; I think they were just ... uh, troop carriers, I don't remember exactly, but you ...

Ed Metzler: Yeah, there's so many of those ... LC ...

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: There's LCTs and LCIs and LC ...

Mr. McWilliams: LC ... yeah. But we crawled down to the nets and into these boats and we were jam packed. Uh, overcome almost by ... diesel fuels, the smell of diesel.

Ed Metzler: And diesel fumes ... both ...

Mr. McWilliams: Fumes ...

Ed Metzler: ... yeah, probably exhaust, yeah.

Mr. McWilliams: ... and ... we were all covered with vomit and salty spray. And some of the guys in ... of course, our ... the ... the landing craft that I was on ... once they were filled with the number that they were supposed to carry ... and I don't know how many were on it, but there were quite a few; we were jam packed. Then they'd load up another one and they'd load up another one ... until all the Marines ... were off the ship ready to go in. And the ships, these

landing craft would circle out ... beyond Peleliu until everybody was assembled, and then they formed waves and went in.

Ed Metzler: Go in in formation.

Mr. McWilliams: And some of the guys, I remember one guy ... who ... the fumes were so overwhelming and if you're covered in vomit of somebody else, you ... you sometimes ... do things you shouldn't, and some guys ... would stand up, look over the side of the ... of the landing craft to get fresh air, and they were good targets for the Japanese whenever we got close enough for them to do. So, it was ... it was ... as much as it stunk and as much as you dreaded to be in vomit and sweat, its safer to be down below ... the sides of the ship.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: But a lot of them ... didn't have that ... didn't ... didn't do that, and they suffered.

Ed Metzler: So, before you even hit the sand ...

Mr. McWilliams: A bunch of them were killed. The ... I do remember ... on my landing ... on my ship ... on the landing craft that I was on, there was a movie star by the name of Bill Lundigan ... of movie Foxtone News. He was ... he was a movie star but he was recruited as ... a ... newscaster. He was taking pictures of the landing, and he was on ... on the ... the little boat that I was on, landing craft ... going on. And we hit the beach and ... the thing that you have to do, and it was ... it was ... we were trained to know it and we were ... reminded of it by our drill instructors, our sergeants ... well, I had a ... the ... the sergeant that was in charge of me was ... his name was Moran (sp?), Sergeant Moran. And when you hit the beach, the word ... you know, "Get off the beach, get off the beach," 'cause that was the target area ... of the Japanese mortars and they ... they loved to ...

Ed Metzler: Pick you off!

Mr. McWilliams: And also, on Peleliu, they ... they buried land mines and artillery shells so that if you stepped on them, you know, they'd ... they'd blow up. So, that's why ... even if you wasn't in the first wave, anybody coming ashore had a

good chance of not making it any further than the shore because of the land mines and the artillery shells that they stepped on.

Ed Metzler: That's what we call an IUD now.

Mr. McWilliams: It is.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter), but back then it was ...

Mr. McWilliams: Exactly, exactly what it is.

Ed Metzler: ... the result is the same. So, what does Peleliu look like? Is it just a low ... kind of a ... atoll or are there hills?

Mr. McWilliams: It's a ... its coral atoll, but ... and its generally flat, but there are some, surprisingly so, on a ... on a ... like ... like on Peleliu, they did have a ... higher part ... overlooking the airport. The Fifth Regiment, our assignment was to come in and take the airport ... as soon as we could, and we did. And ... the thing about the airport, and its proximity to where the Japanese were inland, the ... the Corsair planes ... would land on Peleliu on one end of the airstrip, get their bombs, load up, take off at the other end, drop their bomb and come back, and some of them ... were back in fifteen seconds, not minutes.

Ed Metzler: That's a short run!

Mr. McWilliams: Fifteen seconds, a short run!

Ed Metzler: (Chuckles)

Mr. McWilliams: And, the thing about Peleliu ... I'm sure if you've interviewed other people that were ... you have, I know, interviewed people of Peleliu. The Japanese, for the first time, realized that they were not going to try to meet us at the beach like they did on ... on the Marianas and Gilbert islands and some of those Marshalls. And what they had done ... they knew that it was going to be one of the islands ... that was going to be hit. And way before we got there, they started digging caves, huge caves, in the coral rock, and there was a lot of tombs, burial tombs, there, so the caves and the tombs ... were ... were broken into in such a way ... that they were ... interlocked. You could go from one to the other to the other to the other. And so, the Japanese, prior to the time that we got there, put all their big guns and all their troops

and waited in those caves ... for us to land before ... we didn't know that. We didn't know that ... they had ... that they were all in the caves. Because three days before we landed on Peleliu, our Navy and planes, Air Force, had bombed Peleliu into almost ... ob ... there wasn't anything left.

Ed Metzler: Almost flattened it, yeah.

Mr. McWilliams: Almost flattened it. In fact, the word was sent to ... headquarters ... , "We ... we're out of targets. What ... can we bypass?" And they even thought about bypassing some of the higher command. They thought about bypassing Peleliu 'cause there wasn't anything left. But when we got there, we found out that was a hell of a lot difference because all those Japanese ... and all the guns that had been on the surface, they were still there, but they were in these caves. And they came out the minute that we came ashore, and that's when they really, really ... began to hit us hard.

Ed Metzler: So, when you hit the beaches, it was pretty smooth?

Mr. McWilliams: Fairly smooth, fairly smooth.

Ed Metzler: Except for some of the ... booby traps and ...

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah. And I'll ... I'll tell this ... maybe I shouldn't tell it because it ... it's a little funny, but it's not quite the act of bravery. When we landed, the Japanese were beginning to drop their mortar shells on the beach, and I could look to my left and I could see a ... a shell exploding here, then another shell would explode a little ... little closer, and a little shell, uh, another ... shell was hitting a little closer, so common sense says, "You better get the hell out of there!" So, me and my buddy, I was ... we started running down the beach; they told us to get off the beach. We were running down the beach. Well, some of the other troops saw us running, they thought we were so brave ... we were leading the attack.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter), reality (laughter).

Mr. McWilliams: Reality we were not.

Ed Metzler: Well, there's the old (unintelligible) that says, "When you start seeing the shells hit, progressing towards you, you run towards the shells ...

Mr. McWilliams: We ...

Ed Metzler: ... because the next ones are going to be ...

Mr. McWilliams: ... yeah, if you could time it, that ... that would be perfect.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, I guess, I don't know what I'd do in that situation.

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: Well, anyhow, you got inland.

Mr. McWilliams: Got inland.

Ed Metzler: So, you're playing the same role here that you were in ... uh, Cape Gloucester?

Mr. McWilliams: Exactly. The ... the first night of ... of the landing on Peleliu which would be December the ... I mean, uh, September the 15th, we ... we dug in, made us ... caves, or I mean, foxholes as much as we could. It was caliche hard coral rock, but if you knew your life depended on getting down below ground ...

Ed Metzler: You found a way!

Mr. McWilliams: ... you found a way to dig.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter)

Mr. McWilliams: I was in the ... that night, I was in ... in the foxhole, and the Japanese were sending mortars our way, and a mortar shell exploded ... right near where I was, and a piece of shrapnel ... hit me in the leg. It didn't break the skin, and in fact, I ... I brought with me today, the piece of shrapnel that hit me in the leg and hit in ... in the coconut log that was right ... right near.

Ed Metzler: Can we look at it?

Mr. McWilliams: I'd be happy to show it to you (looking for the piece of shrapnel).

Ed Metzler: A real piece of Japanese shrapnel.

Mr. McWilliams: You can open it up, Ed, and ...

Ed Metzler: Okay, so we're ... opening ... inside a piece of paper pieces of shrapnel and ...

Mr. McWilliams: This is what it says.

Ed Metzler: Oh, okay. Yeah, I'm reading the paper; I'm looking at ... "Piece of shrapnel hit me in the leg, other pieces imbedded in a log beside me, Peleliu, 1944." Wow!

Mr. McWilliams: I did not ...

Ed Metzler: “Compliments of the Empire of Japan.”

Mr. McWilliams: Compliments of the Empire of Japan. And I did not get a ... Purple Heart, I did not apply for it, didn’t want it because it was so insignificant. I mean, put ... people were killed and hurt and wounded ... severely, but I wasn’t. I kept the ... the shrapnel, but I ... I didn’t carry it beyond that; I didn’t try to get a Purple Heart or anything.

Ed Metzler: So, how long were you on Peleliu?

Mr. McWilliams: About ... let’s see, September till ... seemed like it was April.

Ed Metzler: So, a long time!

Mr. McWilliams: Yes. Uh, General Rupertus with the First Marine Division had ... said Peleliu would be taken ... in four to five days; he predicted that. And that’s his ... his assessment ...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: ... that Peleliu would be taken in four to five days. And we were there for eight weeks, so ... whatever ... eight weeks is from September the 15th, but we were there ... instead of four days, we were there for eight weeks.

Ed Metzler: Fifty-six days instead of four days (chuckles).

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: So, once you got out of your foxhole ...

Mr. McWilliams: Then you made your way forward as much as you could.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. McWilliams: And ... I don’t want to make it sound like I was a ... a brave hero of ... winning the medals like my ... older two brothers did. I was just one of many. And the guys ahead of me were the ones that ... took the brunt. But ... we had to cross the ... the airstrip, and I remember one of the ... one of the Japanese tanks, they were small, very small compared ... to our Shermans. We had Sherman tanks ... Japanese tanks, and I remember as we crossed the airfield, one of the Japanese tanks had been hit by our shell, had burned, and the Japanese soldier that was in it had crawled ... about half way out, I guess, before he couldn’t make it any further, so his body was charred.

You could ... you could see him and his little dingy was ... still charred, but it was still kind of small looking, if you know what ... I'm talking about.

Ed Metzler: Uhm.

Mr. McWilliams: So, we ... advanced and secured the ... the air ... airfield ... as soon as we could.

Ed Metzler: So, you're supplying ... ammunition to the front lines?

Mr. McWilliams: Yes.

Ed Metzler: So, what is this ... small ammunition or big rounds or ...

Mr. McWilliams: Mostly ... uh, small rounds. One of the big things that we used quite often ... was illuminating ... flares, and you use those at night whenever ... like you set up a ... a perimeter ... set up ... your base camp, and you fire those ... illuminating flares. And they light up the area so you can see any movement ... of the Japanese. I remember, I think it was on ... I think it was on Okinawa ... that's the story I'm about to tell you now happened, but we had those illuminating flares, and I thought I saw something move, I was using a BAR. I saw something move and I ... fired a couple of three rounds, and it ... wasn't ... but a little bit before we'd ... we'd received the word back ... from the First Regiment, "Hey, knock that crap off; somebody put two holes through our command post tent!"

Ed Metzler: (Laughter), and that must have been you! (laughter)

Mr. McWilliams: It must have been me (laughter).

Ed Metzler: (Laughter), you wouldn't get a ... an award for that! (laughter)

Mr. McWilliams: I wouldn't get an award for that, no, I wouldn't.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter)

Mr. McWilliams: But ... back to Peleliu, which was the ... the toughest one of the bunch. To me, it was by far the toughest invasion. It wasn't the ... the bloodiest; Okinawa the bloodiest. There was more people killed, both Japanese and Americans and ...

Ed Metzler: And ...

Mr. McWilliams: ... and civilians.

Ed Metzler: ... and civilians.

Mr. McWilliams: It was over a hundred thousand civilians killed on Okinawa.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. McWilliams: But as far as the ... the tenacity ... of Peleliu, there was none that exceeded. Temperatures got ... as high as a hundred and fifteen degrees. The ... the coral rock was so heavy, so hot, that it would burn through ... through your boon dockers, and when you ... when you're in weather that ... that hot, I mean, Japanese or Americans that were killed, didn't take long for them to start swelling and ... and ...

Ed Metzler: Uhm.

Mr. McWilliams: ... and you had bloated ... carcasses around you that didn't smell all that good.

Ed Metzler: Oh, I'll bet! Now, was it Peleliu where you experienced the banzai charge?

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: Tell me about that.

Mr. McWilliams: Whenever the Japanese, and I think they do it at the end ... wherever they feel like ... locating, we're not going to win; I've got one more chance to make it, they ... they do the banzai attack. And they ... they come at you with the expectation, I think, they want to win, but they, I think they come at you with the expectation that they're not going to.

Ed Metzler: Its pretty much a suicide charge.

Mr. McWilliams: Suicide or attack is ... generally what it is.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: But ... whenever they ... they start yelling ... they don't come silently, they make as much noise to scare the hell out of you ... of you if you can, and so whenever they came across yelling and calling, "Banzai," they were easy to pick off. It ... I don't know of any of them that were ever successful; none of them were successful on us, and tried it more than once.

Ed Metzler: They get close?

Mr. McWilliams: Some of them ... even got as close as ... where the foxholes where, but ... most of them didn't, but some of them did.

Ed Metzler: Did you ever see any Japanese prisoners taken, I mean, POWs, Japanese POWs?

Mr. McWilliams: I didn't ... actually see them taken, but I saw a bunch of them. I remember ...

Ed Metzler: This is at Peleliu?

Mr. McWilliams: I think it was on Peleliu.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: I remember that ... two Marines had a wounded Japanese soldier on a ... canvas ... uh, what do you call those things ... stretchers?

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: And they were seeing how far they could bounce them in the air. We were not ... necessarily ... kind I might say.

Ed Metzler: Politically correct, huh (chuckles).

Mr. McWilliams: Politically correct to the Japanese.

Ed Metzler: Well ...

Mr. McWilliams: In fact, we didn't take many prisoners. Uh, I don't know ... if ... I guess if some of our officers were forced to admit it, uh, they did not encourage ... taking prisoners.

Ed Metzler: Uhm, uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: So, I didn't see many of them.

Ed Metzler: So, you never got up close ... talk to them or ...

Mr. McWilliams: No.

Ed Metzler: ... even if they could speak English, I guess ... they can.

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah. I got close to them, but not ... close enough nor did I want to.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum. So, what are the two or three things that stick in your mind when you think about Peleliu ... the ... just, you know, if I say Peleliu ... what do you think.

Mr. McWilliams: Okay, if ... there's two things. I want ... that ... the first thing, but ... one of the most important ... things that stick in my mind when you say Pelelui ... is my friend Billy Harrell. Uh, the second thing I think is ... the heat and the ... tenacity ... the toughness of fighting. It was ... it was there. Anybody that

was on the island ... was subjected to fighting. They had cooks, they had ... people that were delivering mail, they had ... anybody that was on Peleliu were ... a lot of them were called up to ... to be on the lines. I wasn't ... but a lot of them were. But ... I guess I remember the tenacity ... in the fighting and Billy Harrell as the ones ... the thing I remember most about Peleliu. One of the things I also mentioned a minute ago ... about the caves ...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: ... that they had built ... what the Japanese had done ... they had ... constructed sliding doors, metal doors, that covered the front of these caves so that whenever ... whenever we came ashore and were using small arms, of course, when we came ashore, they had ... Peleliu wasn't a very wide place (throat clearing) so when we came ashore, the ... the artillery had to stop ... the shells coming from the ships ... they knew that they couldn't fire anymore. Up until we landed, they could, but once we landed, they couldn't.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. McWilliams: And the planes that came over couldn't drop their bombs.

Ed Metzler: Just any ole place, that's right.

Mr. McWilliams: That's right. So, when we came ashore, it ... at that time, that the Japanese slid these big, metal sliding doors back ... to open up the area for them to come out. I remember ... I remember that. I guess all in all, it was ... uh, I remember the toughness.

Ed Metzler: Did you ever get out of tents and into ... a barracks or anything like that?

Mr. McWilliams: Not there. Uh, we wasn't there long enough. We were ... we were in ... in tents ...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: ... when you wasn't on the line.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: Now, back on Cape Gloucester we'd mentioned that before.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: We were issued hammocks that we strung up between trees, and they were supposedly water-proof. They ... they had mosquito netting because there were so damned many mosquitos on Cape Gloucester that we ... when you could, you slept ... you slept in one of those. And it had a canvas top to keep the water ... the rain off of you as you slept. If you didn't construct it right, and one of my friends, George Popa (sp?), we called him Papas in my book, he ... he didn't construct his right and he was sleeping in ... like ... sleeping in a bathtub.

Ed Metzler: (Chuckles)

Mr. McWilliams: So much water, and he took his bayonet and punched through the bottom of the ... of the hammock ...

Ed Metzler: So, it'd (unintelligible).

Mr. McWilliams: Let water out, too.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter)

Mr. McWilliams: So, it would drain.

Ed Metzler: Oh, my gosh! (laughter)

Mr. McWilliams: So, that's what we slept in at Cape Gloucester.

Ed Metzler: Oh, my gosh!

Mr. McWilliams: But ... on Peleliu, we were issued camouflage ponchos and they were ... they looked ... well, I say camouflaged, they used camouflaged ponchos at ... Cape Gloucester as well, but they had a different color than what they did ... when you landed on Peleliu, and that's what we just ... slept on the ground.

Ed Metzler: Uhm!

Mr. McWilliams: I was never in a tent at all. I don't know that anybody was ... there were Marines were in a tent on Peleliu.

Ed Metzler: Did you eat field rations or were you ...

Mr. McWilliams: Field rations.

Ed Metzler: You never got a hot meal?

Mr. McWilliams: No. You had ... back then, did ... they ... they had what was called a K-ration, and they would fit in your backpack and fit where you also carried your gas mask. And it was on Peleliu that ... I saw ... uh, the ... smoke of ...

heard a mortar, and it landed not ... not far from where I was, and it was colored, you know, it ... wasn't white smoke, it was dark smoke, had a yellowish tint to it. The first thing that I thought of ... and the first thing that we all thought of ... was it mustard gas. So, you tried to ... get your hammock out, I mean, your gas mask out ...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: ... in ... in a hurry. A lot of them didn't have them. I know, you scrambled around the ... and found one in a hurry, but ... a lot of the Marines would get rid of that gas mask until it was ... what we called Pogy Bait which was candy bars and cigarettes and ... and rations, K-rations. We were talking about what we ate. K-rations and a little bit later on when you had a little bit more time and ... were not ... landing or something, you had ... what we called C-rations. And then on ... on Okinawa, they came out, I think it was Okinawa, could have been Peleliu, they came out ... with what they called P-rations, and P-rations were pretty tolerable food. It had ... cans of bacon. If ... you needed to start a fire, but you didn't have the time enough or the place to do it on Peleliu, but on Okinawa sometimes you did.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: So, the P-rations were ... were quite ... quite good food ... for, you know, for a military type of food.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, given what you had ...

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah, given what we had.

Ed Metzler: ... to deal with, yeah! So, you were pretty happy to ... say adieu to Peleliu and get out of there.

Mr. McWilliams: I was damned happy to get ... say that as all ... as all the rest of us were. We accomplished what we were sent in to do. We ... secured the island, took the airport, so the ... but here's the thing about Peleliu in taking the airport. One of the reasons that we took it was because MacArthur wanted to take it ... as ... to protect his eastern flank and to supply with fighter planes. As difficult as Peleliu was, not one fighter plane ever took ... took off from Peleliu to support the Philippines.

Ed Metzler: Why?!

Mr. McWilliams: Not one, because MacArthur went in on ... on ... on the Philippines before it was scheduled. I don't know whether it was scheduled or he took it before it was scheduled, but actually, he had already gone into the Philippines before we went in on Peleliu.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: So, there was not a single plane, to my knowledge. The first morning ... I mentioned the first night on Peleliu, we had been told that we might be bombed by the Japanese planes, the Zero planes. The Zero was the most popular Japanese plane, fighter plane, that they had.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: And ... the first morning, we ... I could hear the ... the sound of the planes. Remember back in those days, those were propeller planes, and I could hear the planes coming in; we all know it, we all ... knew that it had to be the Japanese planes coming in. Instead, it was the Corsairs, Navy Corsairs, and you talk about a beautiful sight! That was a beautiful sight.

Ed Metzler: Those old gold wings.

Mr. McWilliams: Those ... those great ...

Ed Metzler: Yeah, right.

Mr. McWilliams: ... wing ... dove wings as they called them ...

Ed Metzler: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mr. McWilliams: ... and they flipped ... out. I remember ... talking about planes ... on Cape Gloucester, one of the planes that was coming in, one of the American planes that was coming in to bomb ahead of us, was shot down by our own troops. They saw the plane, they didn't ... they were ... gun-happy you might say ...

Ed Metzler: Yeah, (unintelligible).

Mr. McWilliams: ... and they shot down the plane (throat clearing), so I think the ... the Navy pilots realized that they had to let us know who they were, and the Corsairs would flip their wings back and forth, and then they'd ... signal.

Ed Metzler: Signal, yeah.

Mr. McWilliams: Beautiful, beautiful sight.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, that's a beautiful aircraft, too.

Mr. McWilliams: It was.

Ed Metzler: So, where did you go after ... Peleliu, back to Pavuvu?

Mr. McWilliams: Back to Pavuvu, and we trained again. We didn't know where we were going, but they issued us what we called ... uh, Eisenhower jackets; they were fleece-lined jackets. Well, if you got a ... if you're in the jungles ... in the South Pacific, and you get a fleece-lined jacket issued to you, you know you're going to somewhere where its cooler than what it is there.

Ed Metzler: Its either a snafu or you're going north, one of the two (laughter).

Mr. McWilliams: Exact ... and as it was, we were going to Okinawa. We didn't know that, but when we got to ... got to ...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: ... Pavuvu, but ... we soon learned that we were going in on Okinawa.

Ed Metzler: So, I read somewhere that ... the layover ... between Peleliu and Okinawa was a fairly extended period of time. Iwo Jima was in between there, and ... one of the reasons was that the First Marines took such a ... pummeling ... at Peleliu that they really needed to try and pull it all back together.

Mr. McWilliams: They did.

Ed Metzler: Is that ... is that what you experienced?

Mr. McWilliams: Yes, it is. Each division ... there was the First and the Third and the Sixth and the ... uh, Second Division, each one of them had ... assignments of the Pacific area to ... that was their area, and it so happened that the First Marine Division was assigned to Guadalcanal and New Britain and Peleliu and Okinawa as part of the ... on Okinawa we had ... the First and the Sixth Marine Division, and the Army Seventh, Seventeenth and Twenty-seventh. There was another very, very smart maneuver done by the Second Marine Division on Okinawa. Perhaps in your interview and you've talked to other people, if you haven't heard it, its an interesting story; its true. The Second Marine Division ... when we ... before we went in on Okinawa ... we went in on April the 1st which was Fools ... April's Fools Day and Easter Sunday.

Before we went in, the Second Marine Division made a fake landing on the southern part of Okinawa; they didn't go in, but they went so far as to leave their transport ships, get into the Higgins boats and actually act like they're coming in. What it did ... it pulled seventy-five thousand Japanese soldiers ... down from where they were on the north part of Okinawa ... to the south; it concentrated them to the south. That was a tremendous help ... to us taking Okinawa. I don't know how I got off on that part of the story.

Ed Metzler: That's alright, that's alright.

Mr. McWilliams: But I was ... I was ... I guess you've ... I was talking about ... when you were talking about ... other ... other places being taken in between ...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: ... Peleliu and Okinawa.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: I'm sure they were. I'm not ... I'm not cognizant of ... of what ... where we landed, where the Marines elsewhere. I know, of course ...

Ed Metzler: I know they alternated, uh ...

Mr. McWilliams: All the ...

Ed Metzler: ... the various divisions.

Mr. McWilliams: ... yeah, Guam, Marshalls Islands.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, Tinian ...

Mr. McWilliams: and Eniwetok.

Ed Metzler: ... Tarawa and ... and all ...

Mr. McWilliams: Saipan.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, Saipan.

Mr. McWilliams: Iwo Jima. All of those. You know, they were major, major parts of our war.

Ed Metzler: Uhm, sure.

Mr. McWilliams: Saipan ... was ... proved to be the best air ... airfield. We were bombing ... we were bombing Japan proper from the ships, from the planes, from Saipan.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, Saipan and Tinian.

Mr. McWilliams: Right.

Ed Metzler: Tinian in particular, I think, yeah.

Mr. McWilliams: Right.

Ed Metzler: Which they're right next to each other.

Mr. McWilliams: They were right next to each other.

Ed Metzler: So, when did you find out ... that you were headed to Okinawa? I'm sure it was after you were in route.

Mr. McWilliams: In ... in route, yeah, we found out, and you know, it didn't mean anything to me. I mean, they said, "We're going on ... Okinawa," I wasn't aware ... of where Okinawa was. It was only four hundred miles away from Japan. And in the war, in that ... when the war started in 1941, the Americans ... was nothing; we didn't have an Army, we didn't have a Navy, we didn't have a Marine Corps, and we were ... three thousand miles away from Okinawa ... by the ... I mean, Japan. And by the time we went in ... three years later on Okinawa, Japan was only four hundred miles away, so we were ...

Ed Metzler: It's a door step ... a door step.

Mr. McWilliams: ... well, we were a ... a tidal wave then.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: And when it first started, we were ... calm waters, you might say.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum. So, we've got this huge invasion fleet headed to Okinawa.

Mr. McWilliams: Yes.

Ed Metzler: And you were part of it; you were on what ... a troop ship or ...

Mr. McWilliams: Troop ship. I ... I don't know the ... it might have been when I mentioned the ... the Hayes, and it might have been that I was on the Hayes that went in on Okinawa, I can't remember ...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: ... for sure. I used to ... collect a little piece of dirt off of every place that I ... that we ... that I went into in the Pacific. I had a little piece of dirt from New Guinea and New Britain, and New Caledonia, Okinawa and Peleliu. Thank God I didn't have a ... have to get a piece of dirt from Japan!

Ed Metzler: That's right. So, tell me what happened in Okinawa. I know that's ... a huge story.

Mr. McWilliams: It is a huge story. By the time we went in on Okinawa, the Japanese didn't much care for ... the Okinawans. There's a difference the Japanese soldiers and the Okinawan soldiers. They were ... they were kind of ... looked down on by the Japanese soldiers. They were more expendable than the Japanese soldiers. And the Japanese recruited and put in ... in force some of the ... Okinawans as young as twelve and thirteen years old. They were part of the fighting force ...

Ed Metzler: Uhm!

Mr. McWilliams: ... that the Japanese relied on ... in Okinawa. And Okinawa was ... was a beautiful place before the war started. I've seen pictures of it, and it was ... it was ... cultivated with ... by ... what we called, even then, backward ... farm equipment – oxen, wooden plows. And they grew a lot of rice and ... and vegetables. Okinawa was a pretty ... pretty country. And as I said earlier, we went in on Okinawa on April the 1st. The latter part of March, the planes, mostly from aircraft carriers at that time, some of them were ... from Saipan and Tinian, began to bomb Okinawa. Uh, Okinawa had its share of caves and it had its share of rain. And I have, in my possession, I was able to get it back, I guess I sent it back in ... in my sea bag, but I have a Japanese soldier [s/b samurai sword?]; it ... it belonged to an officer and its highly engraved. It has ... engraved dragons on ... both sides of the blades, and I found it in a cave on Okinawa.

Ed Metzler: A sword?

Mr. McWilliams: A sword. And I also picked up a Japanese rifle that I brought back, and I picked it up off of the battlefields there on Okinawa and I brought it back. Also, I brought back a Japanese flag from Peleliu. I took it off of a dead Japanese soldier on Peleliu. So, I came back with mementos of those two places. Okinawa was ... for the First and the Sixth Marine Division, the first day was relatively calm. We had expected the Japanese to meet us on the beaches like they did ... invite us like they did ... on all the others, but they

didn't. So, we ... we landed ... I think ... I think the beach I landed on was white, called White Beach. And we were in the north part; we all ... landed up there and the Sixth Marine Division turned north, and we went straight across and ... the ... uh, air ... assign ... first days' assignment was to take the ... Cadena Airport. There's another airfield there that I don't remember what the name of it was.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: And the three Army divisions when ... when they landed, they turned south and it was after we secured the northern part of Okinawa before we turned and joined ... forces with the Army toward the ... toward the south.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: So, it was ... it was ... it was tough fighting, cave fighting, muddy fighting. We were, by far, facing ... by far, more Japanese soldiers than we had ever faced before. Some of the other islands you might have ... ten or maybe eleven thousand Japanese soldiers ... defending ... the island; here we had ... well, it was over a hundred thousand of them that was killed. I've heard the story a hundred and ten thousand; don't know whether that's true or not, but ... that's how big a force that we had to fight. And we fought them from ... one step at a time. It was ... take this and take that, then fall back, take that. One of the ... one of the prime areas that we took ... was on Okinawa was a place ... called Shuri Castle. A lot of people have heard about the Shuri Castle. I have a picture (looking through documents).

Ed Metzler: Its down in the south, right?

Mr. McWilliams: Yes, down near ... Naha.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: And ... that's me standing on top of the Shuri Castle; you can see all the ... dead Japanese soldiers ...

Ed Metzler: Boy! Look at them, uhm.

Mr. McWilliams: So, it was ... Naha was ... was a ... was one of the major, uh, cities.

Ed Metzler: It was the capital, wasn't it? Yeah.

Mr. McWilliams: Capital of Okinawa.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: And I've ... recently talked to people who lived, uh, this is a long time after the war, just recently I say, they ... lived in beautiful homes and complexes in the side of Naha in Shuri Castle, and they tell me how nice it is now. It wasn't very nice back in those days. This is me on ... on ...

Ed Metzler: With the Japanese flag.

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: And two of your buddies.

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah. You asked me if I could remember ... some of their names. Uh, those are two of them right there.

Ed Metzler: Ralph holding Glen (?).

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: Now, this is Peleliu here.

Mr. McWilliams: Yes. That's probably ...

Ed Metzler: Yeah, these are ... great photographs.

Mr. McWilliams: You can make copies of them if you'd like.

Ed Metzler: I'd like to. We ... I've got a copy machine right next door that I can use.

Mr. McWilliams: And I guess that's ... the picture of me. Mom had a picture of all six of us ... in a ... all ten of us kids on her bedroom wall, and that was the picture ...

Ed Metzler: Photo of you and in your dress ...

Mr. McWilliams: Dress blues.

Ed Metzler: ... uniform, June 1943, age eighteen.

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah, that was after I joined up and ... I had become ... eighteen at (chuckles) at that time.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter), so what was the toughest period in Okinawa ... your Okinawa experience? I mean, I know it was all ... tough, but what was the ugliest part as you see it?

Mr. McWilliams: Well, I think the ugliest part ... for me, now, for others, it was ugly from the day one to ...

Ed Metzler: Sure.

Mr. McWilliams: ... to the last day. But the first ... first part of Okinawa Campaign ... for me and a bunch of the others who was with the ... Fifth Regiment, we didn't have it, I mean, we ... we lost some people, no doubt about that. But we almost walked across the island, and you don't expect that ... after Peleliu. You don't expect to be walking across an island that you're taking, but we did. So, it was ...

Ed Metzler: Big island loaded with Japanese.

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah. So, it was later on ... that the fighting really got the toughest. As ... to the exact day and time, I ... I don't know that I could ... could remember that. It's ... some of its ... kind of a blur right now.

Ed Metzler: Oh, I understand, and a long time ago, too.

Mr. McWilliams: A long time ago.

Ed Metzler: So, you ... basically walked across the island, and then it was time to turn and ...

Mr. McWilliams: South.

Ed Metzler: ... go south, and help the Army who had run into that mountain range down there with all the different names – Hacksaw Ridge, and all the different names.

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: And the Shuri Castle and ...

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: ... so, tell me about that part.

Mr. McWilliams: Well, I don't know that I could add a lot to ... what I've already said. Shuri Castle was the stronghold of the Japanese. And ... its like ... like it is ... or was in Italy. There's certain battles where the battle was concentrated around one part ... of ... of the island or the whatever you're taking. Shuri Castle was the central part of the fighting. Once the ... once the Japanese lost ... Naha, Shuri Castle, then it was ... less organized. The Japanese were still going to kill you if they could, and did. But it was not quite as coordinated as it was to begin with.

Ed Metzler: So, did you see ... American casualties close by, all around you?

Mr. McWilliams: Yes.

Ed Metzler: At Shuri?

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: Almost hand to hand type ... combat?

Mr. McWilliams: I didn't get ... hand to hand ... there in Okinawa. A lot of it was ... close enough to where you used your rifle, but I'm sure a lot of the Marines could tell you a whole lot more than I could ...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. McWilliams: ... about hand to hand fighting. I didn't ... but they did.

Ed Metzler: And did you ... link up with the U.S. Army down there or did you guys fight kind of side by side but come together.

Mr. McWilliams: Side by side, we stayed ... the Marines generally stayed ... we were under the Tenth Army. Uh, General Buckner who was Army Commander who was killed on Okinawa ...

Ed Metzler: Buckner Bay is the named after him.

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah, he was ... he was in charge of the Tenth Army, and the First Marine Division, I believe, I think I'm right on this, uh, was ... we were one under the Tenth Fleet; I believe it was the Tenth Fleet, but we were under ... under ... the command ... central command that Buckner was (unintelligible). Now, one of the things that ... that I did see, uh, the Japanese on Okinawa ... started using kamikaze planes.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: And I got up ... real close to one of the kamikaze planes that had ... come in and ... and did not explode; he landed and it was ... it was ... a deadly weapon. The kamikaze planes, suicidal, and the troops, the Marines and the Army ... on land ... were hit, not as much as they were hit on the Navy ships because you can sink a Navy ship with a ... with a ... plane, kamikaze plane, whereas on land, you might kill a few soldiers or Marines.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, its just like a bomb on land, yeah.

Mr. McWilliams: Absolutely! Like a bomb on land, is a good way of putting it. So, that was ... you know, you had ... and also ... also, Okinawa, to my knowledge, was

the first place in the ... in World War II where the Japanese soldiers ... surrendered.

Ed Metzler: That's what I heard, too.

Mr. McWilliams: Up until then, they fought ... till ... they died or some of them were captured, but mostly the Japanese fought until ... they were killed. But on Okinawa, they had a lot of them who did ... uh, surrender, give up, had a lot of civilians that gave up, a lot of civilians that were killed on Okinawa.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, wasn't it Okinawa where the ... the ... the natives were jumping off the cliffs because they (unintelligible) ... or Iwo Jima, I can't ...

Mr. McWilliams: Iwo Jima.

Ed Metzler: ... that was Iwo Jima, okay.

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: Yeah. You never saw anything but a tent or a foxhole then when you were on Okinawa? Or did you actually get ... were you there long enough to where you had ...

Mr. McWilliams: You know, I can't remember that I ever stayed in a tent ... on Okinawa.

Ed Metzler: Oh really?!

Mr. McWilliams: I'm sure I must have but I ... I remember tents more in ... in Pavuvu, our rest camp.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: Than I do any other ... other ...

Ed Metzler: So, you just out in the open then, huh?

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah, looking back on it, we must have had tents that we slept in.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. McWilliams: But I ... for the life of me, I ... I don't know that I remember it.

Ed Metzler: So, if I asked you the same question about Okinawa that I asked you about ... Peleliu, if I say, "Okinawa," what are the two or three or four things that come into your mind that you would just ... blurt out?

Mr. McWilliams: We were there when the atomic bombs were dropped.

Ed Metzler: Oh, you were there, okay.

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: You were an occupation force at that point 'cause the island had been secured ... secured in June.

Mr. McWilliams: Yes, and the bombs were dropped in August.

Ed Metzler: Correct.

Mr. McWilliams: And August the 6th and the 9th ...

Ed Metzler: That ... sounds right.

Mr. McWilliams: And then the ... Japan surrendered on the 15th.

Ed Metzler: 15th.

Mr. McWilliams: But I was on the island. And a lot of people ... nowadays would say, "You know, it was terrible that we dropped the atomic bomb ... that we killed so many Japanese soldiers." Well, I'll put it to you this way, if you're on Okinawa, then you're in the military, and you know that next week you're going to board ship to try to land on the shores of Japan ... knowing how fanatical they are; you got a good chance of not making it.

Ed Metzler: Very good chance!

Mr. McWilliams: So, you're more inclined to believe, "Maybe an atomic bomb ... might have saved my life," and that's how I firmly believe.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, and that's absolutely right.

Mr. McWilliams: Atomic bombs ... kill less people actually than some of the fire bombing that was done over in Europe and in Japan itself.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: So ... but I do remember ... I was on Okinawa when we heard ... that the atomic ... we didn't know whether the atomic ... I didn't ... what an atomic bomb was, but way they described it, it was something good ... for us.

Ed Metzler: So, where were you on Okinawa when ... when the ... you heard about the A-bomb drop? Were you in the Naha area or ...

Mr. McWilliams: We must have been in the Naha area.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum, was it ...

Mr. McWilliams: 'Cause I don't remember that ... once we left the north and went south ... I don't remember that we ever went ... back up north.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum, uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: So, we must have been ... we must have been camped.

Ed Metzler: So, was there a lot of talk amongst you guys about, "Well, the next step's going to be Japan!"

Mr. McWilliams: We knew it was coming. And we knew that it was going to be brutal. We had sense enough to know. Scuttlebutt ... sometimes ... it always gets around.

Ed Metzler: (Unintelligible) ... (laughter), yeah.

Mr. McWilliams: But sometimes it's right.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, that's right!

Mr. McWilliams: So, the scuttlebutt was that ... the Japanese were going to defend their island, the women, the children ... that it was broomsticks, rifles, spears, knives, whatever they could get; they were not going to give us. Although as I said, we did have some that surrendered on Okinawa. But we knew that if we went in on Japan, Honshu was where we were supposed to land. And the First Marine Division ... I've seen ... I've seen ... uh, write-ups about how the plan was to take place.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: And the First Marine Division was one of the first ones ... that was supposed to ... go in, and we were ... supposed to have been on Honshu.

Ed Metzler: Uhm.

Mr. McWilliams: So, we knew it. I was not ... unhappy at all ... to hear that the atomic bombs had been dropped.

Ed Metzler: Were you writing letters home during ... your stay out in ...

Mr. McWilliams: I did. I wrote a lot of letters, uh, and I kept notes. And while I was overseas, it was ... forbidden to write too much about it, and you couldn't have, of course, write home ...

Ed Metzler: You weren't supposed to keep a log ...

Mr. McWilliams: No.

Ed Metzler: ... because if you had ever fell in enemy hands, it could ...

Mr. McWilliams: And you know, our mail was censored both going and coming.

Ed Metzler: Correct.

Mr. McWilliams: But I kept notes. And after the war was over, I ... and we made our final moves ... final meaning ... moving to the house where we are now; I had it built in Fair Oaks Ranch.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: And I found the notes that I had taken ... all during the war.

Ed Metzler: Really?!

Mr. McWilliams: And I read them to Maggie. I said, “Maggie, listen to this,” and she said, “You know, that’d make a wonderful story, wouldn’t it?” And I said, “It really would.” And she said, “Why don’t you write it?” So, I applied ... to the University of Iowa, Bible Writing School, was accepted, went there for two summers, wrote ... my first novel, and Ed, I remember so well ... the night that I figured I’d written about ... everything ... I wanted to write ... about World War II, and it was late at night. And I went downstairs. I’d told (throat clearing) ... I’m going to get a little emotional.

Ed Metzler: That’s alright.

Mr. McWilliams: But I had told (throat clearing) Maggie that evening (throat clearing), I said, “I think I’ll finish the book tonight. I’ve written ... about everything ... that I want to write about.” So, when I finished writing that night (throat clearing) I closed up the computer. And we have a balcony, we kind of have a second story to our house, and I walked out on the balcony, and I looked at the stars and I remember how bright they were. And I went downstairs because I was thinking about ... all my buddies, and I went downstairs ... and Maggie had a bottle of champagne and two glasses, and we drank a toast ... to all those who didn’t (tears) didn’t come home ... as well as those who did. A very emotional time for me.

Ed Metzler: You bet.

Mr. McWilliams: I look back on ... on World War II and I think of ... all the killing and the misery ... but, those ... there were some moments I look back on, and I just die laughing. Like ... one of the ... like one time ... when we were on Pavuvu, we had this Second Lieutenant ... that just joined us; we’d just come back ... from Peleliu, and when you come back from Peleliu, uh, you know,

you don't have quite the feeling about things as you might otherwise. We had this Second Lieutenant that ... came ... came aboard and we had ... let our hair ... let our hair grow pretty long, and I ... we ... we ... wanted to play a trick on this Second Lieutenant. We passed the word that ... I'd been a barber ... back in civilian life.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter)

Mr. McWilliams: (Laughter), I'd ... (laughter) ... I'd never given anybody a haircut in my ...

Ed Metzler: In your life! (laughter)

Mr. McWilliams: I had sheared sheep but never ... never ... given a haircut.

Ed Metzler: (Chuckles)

Mr. McWilliams: But he fell for it, and he came and he said, "Corporal McWilliams, can you give me a haircut?" And I said, "I sure can, Lieutenant."

Ed Metzler: (Chuckles)

Mr. McWilliams: And I set him down on this GI can, and I had gotten these ... the clippers and scissors ... from the Red Cross, uh, they had given it to our Marine outfit some way or another. So, I set the Lieutenant down and I started cutting his hair and I ... told ... my buddy, I said, "Now, is ... if I cut his hair and it falls to the ground, you pick it up and move it off till he can't see it, so he doesn't know how much I'm cutting off." Well, I cut his hair and I cut it pretty ... pretty good (chuckles).

Ed Metzler: Pretty short, huh (laughter).

Mr. McWilliams: He ... he keeps saying, "Corporal, I ... I just wanted a trim." And ...

Ed Metzler: (Laughter)

Mr. McWilliams: ... (chuckle) I said, "I'm not cutting hair ... uh, a lot," said, "look on the ground, you don't see a lot of hair."

Ed Metzler: (Laughter)

Mr. McWilliams: Well, he couldn't 'cause ... my buddy had taken it.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter)

Mr. McWilliams: But when he got back to his tent and looked in the mirror, I heard him scream!

Ed Metzler: (Laughter)

Mr. McWilliams: (Laughter), and maybe ... I ran to my tent, we were living in tents at the time, and I ... crawled into my cot, but he found me anyway.

Ed Metzler: He found you anyhow; what did he do?

Mr. McWilliams: Put me on guard duty.

Ed Metzler: Oh (laughter), that's all?! (laughter)

Mr. McWilliams: And shit detail.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter), well, you know, it's funny ... uh, you launched into your story about something you laugh about as you look back on World War II; that's one of the questions that I ask guys, and you just did it naturally. I didn't even have to ask, you know, we say, "What was the worst time," and then you say ... "What ... what were some of the funny things that happened?"

Mr. McWilliams: I must ...

Ed Metzler: And you did it without me even asking!

Mr. McWilliams: I must tell you about another funny thing.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mr. McWilliams: This same Lieutenant ... had a pet chicken.

Ed Metzler: (Chuckles)

Mr. McWilliams: And this chicken had been given to him by a native on the island, Pavuvu. This ... this Lieutenant with this chicken ... was almost like ... the ... "Mutiny ... Mutiny on the Caine," you remember that movie?

Ed Metzler: Uh hum, uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: Well, he was almost ... that type to me; it seemed like it. Anyway, he had this pet chicken, and me and ... and Ike ... decided one night we were going to steal his chicken. Before all that we had made jungle juice; have you ever heard of jungle juice?

Ed Metzler: Well, yeah, its alcoholic stuff made out of ... whatever you could get!

Mr. McWilliams: One hundred and ninety-proof ... sick bay alcohol.

Ed Metzler: Yeah. Oh! Is that ... sick bay alcohol.

Mr. McWilliams: Sick bay alcohol, and any fruit that you could get from the mess hall and you put it in a big can and it ferments and it makes ... makes a drink.

Ed Metzler: Uhm!

Mr. McWilliams: And its powerful. And it was about five or ten of us ... drank five gallons of sick bay alcohol that night. And it was at that ... on that night that we decided that we'd go steal his ... (chuckles) officer's chicken.

Ed Metzler: (Unintelligible), there's a cause and effect here I think, yeah (laughter).

Mr. McWilliams: We got the chicken and someone said, "Well what ... what are you going to do with the chicken?" And I said, "Well, let's make chicken soup out of it. There's not enough to barbeque it or ... fry it for the whole group, so we'll make chicken soup." And one guy says, "Well, we've got to pluck the feathers off of it first." I said, "No, if you do that, there's not going to be anything left, so ..."

Ed Metzler: (Laughter), that skinny, huh?

Mr. McWilliams: (Laughter)

Ed Metzler: (Laughter)

Mr. McWilliams: So, we just ... put the whole chicken, guts, everything, feathers and everything ... into this pot of ... boiling water, and we ate that chicken soup. Now, we were sick because the sick bay alcohol and the ... chicken soup wasn't ... wasn't too good either.

Ed Metzler: Not a good mix (chuckles).

Mr. McWilliams: And ... the next morning, the Lieutenant looked for us, and I guess he knew me from giving him the haircut ... that I'd be doing something like that. And he looked first for me and ... again, I was hiding under my cot (chuckles).

Ed Metzler: And he found you ... again.

Mr. McWilliams: He found me again.

Ed Metzler: And you ... and you got guard duty again.

Mr. McWilliams: Uh, shit detail (chuckles)

Ed Metzler: Yeah, right (laughter).

Mr. McWilliams: So, those were some of the funny things. So, you had to have ... laughter ...

Ed Metzler: Absolutely!

Mr. McWilliams: ... as well as moments to cry.

Ed Metzler: Absolutely. When did you come home after the war?

Mr. McWilliams: Uh, I got my discharge ... or told to come home in January, 1946.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mr. McWilliams: We were in Peking; we had been to China.

Ed Metzler: Oh!

Mr. McWilliams: After Okinawa ...

Ed Metzler: Oh!

Mr. McWilliams: ... we went to Peking, China as ...

Ed Metzler: So, you're a China Marine also?!

Mr. McWilliams: I am. And after Okinawa we went to ... to Jap ... uh, China to disarm the Japanese soldiers there. And we were there until January, oh, before I ... before I forget that ... let me tell you about ... I know I was asked the question one time, "What did you do for entertainment? What'd you do while you were overseas?" We played football with a coconut.

Ed Metzler: (Chuckle)

Mr. McWilliams: Now, you can pass a football, you can run with one, but don't try to kick an extra point with a ...

Ed Metzler: (Laughter)

Mr. McWilliams: ... with a coconut!

Ed Metzler: (Laughter)

Mr. McWilliams: The reason I thought about that ... is because when we got to China, we ... I was able to get a real football, and we played ... football as recreational. But I was ... given a discharge, told I'd ... be discharged in January, 1946, and we came back to Okinawa, I mean, back to San Diego. And all the time we'd ... we'd been aboard ship, every time we got aboard ship they said, "Wear your life jackets, wear your life jacket, 'cause if the ship sinks, they ... they might save your life." So, when we pulled into the harbor at ... San Diego, we took off our life jacket, threw it in the water ... guess what? They sank (laughter).

Ed Metzler: (Laughter), so much for the concept of ...

Mr. McWilliams: A lot of ... I've put a ... I say, a lot of them do.

Ed Metzler: ... life jackets (laughter).

Mr. McWilliams: Well, then from San Diego, I got my discharge, and my dad, as a Ranger, at this time, he was a Deputy Sheriff in Rankin, Texas, and so I rode the bus from San Diego ... San Diego ... to Rankin. And as we ... the bus was coming into Rankin, he was driving pretty fast, but he tried to apply his brakes; he had no brakes and he realized that if he went ... as small as Rankin was, he realized that if he didn't stop, no telling what damage he was going to do to people in the buildings and to the bus ... himself. And he tried to turn the bus ... and when he did, the bus turned over. And I flew out through the front glass ... of the bus. I landed on my shoulder, and I looked up and the bus was ... coming over on top of me, and I managed to scoot out from underneath the bus ... before it crashed. One lady got her ... back broken, other people got hurt real bad, but the only thing that happened to me was I had one of the emblems, Marine emblems on my uniform that came off. And I've thought many times, I've gone through the war, through battles, and then came that close to getting killed.

Ed Metzler: Getting killed when you rolled the (unintelligible).

Mr. McWilliams: When I ... when we ... coming home.

Ed Metzler: Oh, my goodness! What a story!

Mr. McWilliams: So, then ... my dad met us ...

Ed Metzler: And you ...

Mr. McWilliams: ... Dad was an officer there (throat clearing), and this bus driver ... he found me and he said, "Marine, you said your dad ... works here ... in this town?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Tell ... don't tell him I did anything wrong ... don't tell me I ... I did anything wrong; I couldn't help what I was doing." I said, "You don't have to worry about it." And Dad couldn't have cared less ... about what the driver did or didn't do; he was more interested in seeing me ... after the war was over.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, that was his focus at the time!

Mr. McWilliams: Right.

Ed Metzler: Let me ask you a broad question here. How do you ... feel your World War II experience changed you as a person?

Mr. McWilliams: I think it made me a better person, I really do. I think it gave me ... an insight to life that I wouldn't have had. And I think today if more ... kids ... could experience the military experience, I think they would benefit ... a lot. And I think ... all of us who were in World War II, the call us the Greatest Generation," well, it's great not only because of what we did, but what we did after the war. The GI Bill was one of the biggest ... aids to the military that I've ever read about.

Ed Metzler: Biggest aid to the *nation!*

Mr. McWilliams: Aid to the nation, aid to the nation is right! So, I look back on World War II, I made some of the best friends I'll ever make, probably *the* best friends I've ever made. And there's only one other ... Marine out of the six of us that's still alive; his name is Ike Iverson (sp?). He lives in San Angelo. But he's my best friend, always was, always will be. So, I think it made ... men out of boys in a short period of time. And I think it made women ... out of girls in a short period of time; we grew up. We had pride in our country that I sometimes feel like we don't quite have, not enough of us do, in today's world. We ... we were willing and anxious to serve our country, and it made us proud to do that. So, I'm ... totally, totally proud of my experience in World War II. And I know it made us ... best. Dad and Mom taught us to be ... the best we could be, and the Marines made sure that we were.

Ed Metzler: I like that; that is ... a good way to say it! Let me ... flip the coin now, and ask you another question. How do you feel about the Japanese today ... faces ... what you went through?

Mr. McWilliams: In all honesty, I don't like the Japanese. A lot of ... went so far to ... they wouldn't even buy a Japanese product ... like Japanese cars. I never did take it to that extreme, but I don't have ... I don't have the respect ... for the Japanese person. And I hate to say that because ... but, in honesty, that's the way I feel. I've ... run across a very few Japanese ... people. When I was writing my story, I was able to contact a Japanese ... person, and told him what I was writing, let him read some of what I'd written, and asked him, I said, "Is this ... is this okay? Am I writing about something that ... you

never even heard of in Japan, and you don't believe its true?" And they agreed, "Yeah, what you've written is pretty much the truth." So, there's ... I have run into a few Japanese people that I have learned to respect, but ... and I shouldn't say this, but ... my anger and animosity toward the Japanese soldier ... they taught us that way. They showed pictures in training camps ... of the Japanese soldiers and they made him look like he was ... you know, totally wrong, totally crazy, fierce, teeth hanging out, blood dripping. They told us to hate the Japanese. And ... uh, I guess ... I guess one comparison, you might say, you take an NFL football player and you can put him on the football field, and he wants to tear your head off, and he leaves the field and he wants to ... be the nicest guy in the world. It's hard for him to make that change. It was hard for us, all of us, to change from the way we felt about the Japanese to one of ... of love and compassion now. I'm sorry to say I don't have that.

Ed Metzler: What else about World War II can we talk about? You got some stories you still want to tell?

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah. Someone asked me one time (throat clearing) if someone hears what we're saying now or reads it, what will they gain, if anything, from my story to you. What will it mean to them? Well, we ... the servicemen who served overseas came home with a lot of memories, but we came home with a lot of nightmares. World War II veterans are dying ... pretty rapidly nowadays, and not too many of them left. And there's some memories that I want to remember, some memories that I want to forget. Uh, some things I can't forget. I cannot forget ... some of the white crosses that I saw on ... some of the islands. I won't ... I cannot forget the white cross in Italy in Anzio where my brother is buried. And I can't forget ... of the sailors who lost their lives ... and are buried beneath the sea. Ronald, my brother, that won ... the Silver Star in the Navy ... he came back to the States and he was put into the Navy V5-12, uh, V-5 prog ... or might have been V-12; I think it was V-5. He went back to SMU and he played football there, so ... very ... to my knowledge every Marine ... or serviceman that served in World War

II ... came back and did something ... with their lives. I'm sure there's a lot of them that didn't, but the ones that I personally know ... they learned enough from being in the service ... to where they made better citizens out of themselves. I'd like to say that ... the guys that go into the service, guys and gals that go into the service now ... will do the same thing, and I think most of them have.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: I've ... I ment ... I wanted to say this ... when I came back to ... after the war, I went back ... to college and got my two degrees there, and that's where I met Maggie. I ... I haven't talked much about her, but ... she's ... a big, big, big part of my life. We ... in June of this year we will have been married seventy years.

Ed Metzler: Isn't that wonderful!

Mr. McWilliams: It's a wonderful time. But I met her in college, and we dated, we had fun. We ... I ... I stayed in contact with ... the buddies that came back. Uh, Billy Harrell ... didn't, and ... many years ago back in the late 18, uh, 1980s, one of the guys that was with me, Queenie was his name, called me and he said, "I finally found you; I've been searching for you." He said, "I know how to find Popa; do you know how to find Iverson?" And we did, and the four of us met ... and went to Gatlinburg, and they ... I hadn't seen them since the war ended. And as we drove through the town of Gatlinburg, past a beauty ... uh, beauty shop with ... with a manikin out in front in the windows with a red, curly wig ... so I stopped and asked the person, I said, "I'm going to meet some Marine buddies that hadn't seen me in ... many, many, many years, can I borrow that wig, and I'll bring it back?" She said, "Yeah."

Ed Metzler: (Laughter)

Mr. McWilliams: So, I go in and I get on this ... red, curly wig and I get out of the car where these other guys were, Queenie and Popa, and they looked at me and said, "Mac, is that ... is that you?! Curly, red hair?!" We kept in touch.

Ed Metzler: That's great.

Mr. McWilliams: And we ... I had them visit us in Fair Oaks Ranch, they and their wives.

Ed Metzler: That's great!

Mr. McWilliams: In fact, one of them ... Queenie had a boy and he named him after me.

Ed Metzler: I'll be darned!

Mr. McWilliams: Donald Garrett Queen.

Ed Metzler: That's great, yeah. Now, one of the things that you and I discussed before we started the ... the recording, was that if we had the opportunity to allow you a few minutes to talk some more about your parents, and I think about the experience with your brother in Anzio.

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: So, I'd like to let you do that now, so go ahead.

Mr. McWilliams: Okay.

Ed Metzler: You got ... you got the air.

Mr. McWilliams: (Throat clearing), well, Dad was a rancher, Mom and Dad were ranchers in the ... right before and during ... the crash, the Wall Street crash of 1928, and they knew prices were falling. Lambs and wool were ... falling, and Dad had enough sense ... and Mom, to get out of the ranching business before ... it really hit. And so, that's when Dad moved ... the family into Ballinger, and he ran for Sheriff and was elected. Dad was a very stern person. Some of my brothers and sisters, maybe even, I know my younger brother did, was almost (chuckles) afraid of Dad because he was so stern. He didn't ... he didn't fool around. And Mom was one of the most ... wonderful persons ... that ever lived in the ... in this earth. She was a ... an angel on death, uh, on ... on earth.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. McWilliams: And she was called Granny Mom or Mama Mac, and ...

Ed Metzler: Mama Mac (chuckles).

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah, and ...

Ed Metzler: I like that.

Mr. McWilliams: ... and Mom and Dad ... were wonderful, wonderful parents to us kids.

Ed Metzler: All ten of you!

Mr. McWilliams: All ten of us. Ronald did something that he shouldn't have when Dad was Sheriff, and Dad took him upstairs and put him in jail.

Ed Metzler: (Chuckles)

Mr. McWilliams: Locked the door ...

Ed Metzler: Real jail! (laughter)

Mr. McWilliams: ... the real jail.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter), right.

Mr. McWilliams: And he made Mom promise not ... not to let him out until he came home to let him out himself. So, Dad was ... was firm, but he was fair. Mom, as I said, she loved ... she loved kids. She could walk into a room, and every kid in that room would want to sit in her lap; she was that kind of a person. She was Grammy Mom to everyone of them, or Mom Mac. So, I ... (throat clearing) I can't say enough about both of them about what they taught us as kids. Taught us to be fair and honest, good, and ... back then, you know, there ... there wasn't any such a thing as ... as ... you lose your job and you get paid ... anyway ... compensation. You lived on what you made, and if you didn't make it, you didn't live. And Dad and Mom both taught us the value of money, but they taught us how to be good people, and that's what we've tried to do, me and Maggie, what we've tried to do with our kids and grandkids. And I must say, every one of them has taken the lesson good.

Ed Metzler: That's great!

Mr. McWilliams: Every one of them; not a ... not a black sheep in the bunch!

Ed Metzler: That's great; that makes you proud, doesn't it?

Mr. McWilliams: It does, it makes me very proud. But every one of them.

Ed Metzler: Tell me about Anzio.

Mr. McWilliams: It wasn't (throat clearing) won the Silver Star during the Battle of Cassina [s/b Monte Cassino], and his Commanding Officer was killed.

Ed Metzler: This is your older brother?

Mr. McWilliams: Older brother.

Ed Metzler: Yes.

Mr. McWilliams: The one in the Army. His ... his Commanding Officer was killed, and Elwood (sp?) took over the command, and led his troops across ... this ... river, and that was on February the 4th, 1944. Back in Ozona, that's where the family lived during that period of time, Billy, my younger brother, was the only one at home heard Mom crying, and he got up and he went into her bedroom, and he said, "Mom, why are you crying?" And she said, "Something's happened to Elwood." And he said, "Oh Mom, no it ... no." She said "Yes, he's been hurt." And she described the scene, a river scene where Elwood was hurt. And sometime later, Army Chaplain came to the door and he knocked on the door and he said, "Are you Mrs. McWilliams?" "Yes." "I hate to tell you, but ... your son, Staff Sergeant Roland Elwood McWilliams was killed on February the 4th." And that was on February the 4th ... beforehand ... that Billy heard Mom crying.

Ed Metzler: And she ... and no word ... at all, she just felt it, huh?

Mr. McWilliams: She knew it.

Ed Metzler: Isn't that something?!

Mr. McWilliams: And while I was working overseas with Sinclair, I made a trip back over to Italy from Algiers and I visited his grave. And every military cemetery I've ever been on ... was beautiful (throat clearing), well-manicured, well ... well kept, and I ... I bought flowers and ... put it on his gravesite. And (throat clearing) Mom had the choice of either bringing him home or leaving him there, and she said, "No, let him stay ... with those ... who died with him," so that's why he's there. Now, I mention Ronald, I must tell you about him ... how he earned his Silver Star. He was on a ... a ship that had been torpedoed off the coast of Tulagi ... near Guadalcanal. And his ship was on fire and it was burning, and they were ... the Captain gave the order to abandon ship, and all the sailors were going topside to get into the ... into the life boats. And Ronald heard some knocking on one of the doors as he came up, and he ... it was locked, and he came up and he asked the Captain could he go back down and help the guy or guys ... he didn't know. And the Captain told him, he said, "The ship's burning, it's going to explode. You ...

we got to get out of here!” And Ronald said, “Leave me a boat, and I’ll go down.” So, he went back down and he forced open the door, and he carried two sailors. One of them was dead; he didn’t know it, but the other one wasn’t, and he carried both of those up, got in the ... in the boat and pulled away from the ship ... before it exploded, and he got the Silver Star.

Ed Metzler: Okay. Are you worn out?

Mr. McWilliams: I could talk longer, but ...

Ed Metzler: (Laughter)

Mr. McWilliams: You (laughter) ... you are.

Ed Metzler: Thank you for ... spending the time with me.

Mr. McWilliams: I enjoyed it.

Ed Metzler: Want to say a parting word before I shut it down?

Mr. McWilliams: Yeah. I want to say that ... our country ... needs to be united ... right now. Now, the ... men and women, Marines, Navy, Coast Guardsmen, Air ... Air people of World War II ... we ... we’re passing on, and I hope that we have left a foundation for our country to get together, and make it like it used to be. Well, that’s not quite right. Make it even better than it used to be, and I think it will, so ... I’m ... I love the military, I love being part of the Greatest Generation, and ... I’ll never forget World War II.

(end of interview)

FINAL copy
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