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Interview with Franklin B. Murphy

U. S. Marine Corps

Interview With Franklin B. Murphy

Today is November twentieth, 2003. We are in the Nimitz Hotel and I will be interviewing Mr. Franklin B. Murphy. This interview is taking place here for the support of the National Museum of the Pacific War Center for Pacific War Studies, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Graham: Mr. Murphy, tell me, first, when and where were you born?

Mr. Murphy: I was born in Milford, Maine, June the 4th, 1921.

Mr. Graham: Where did you go to school?

Mr. Murphy: In Maine, Milford, Maine.

Mr. Graham: High school there?

Mr. Murphy: High school and college.

Mr. Graham: What was the name of your parents?

Mr. Murphy: Andrew and Eleanor Murphy.

Mr. Graham: Let me ask you one question, we like to always find out is, where were you and what were you doing December seventh, 1941?

Mr. Murphy: I was in church December 7th, 1941.

Mr. Graham: And when did you hear about this?

Mr. Murphy: About eight o'clock in the evening, that same day. In church.

Mr. Graham: Now tell us, how did you come about joining your choice of military service?

Mr. Murphy: I always wanted to be in the Marines. When I finally got drafted, I decided instead of being drafter, I'd go join, I went and enlisted in the Marines before the Army got me.

Mr. Graham: Where did you take your basic training?

Mr. Murphy: Perris Island, South Carolina.

Mr. Graham: And after your basic training, did you go into further training, or were you assigned?

Mr. Murphy: No, I went to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, for communications school.

Mr. Graham: How long were you there?

Mr. Murphy: Eight to ten, about ten weeks, I believe.

Mr. Graham: In general, what were you being trained for?

Mr. Murphy: Communications, telephone, wiring, operating the PBX switchboards, cryptographic machines, anything to do with communications. Laying lines, and so forth.

Mr. Graham: About how long did you stay in training?

Mr. Murphy: Ten weeks.

Mr. Graham: Just ten weeks. And then, were you assigned then?

Mr. Murphy: We were assigned, I was assigned then, we were transferred from Camp Lejeune to Camp Pendleton, California. There I was assigned to what they called the first joint salt signal company. It was attached to no certain regiment or _____??

Mr. Graham: How long did you stay there?

Mr. Murphy: About a month. We didn't really receive much additional training, this was just—

Mr. Graham: Assigned to a unit?

Mr. Murphy: No.

Mr. Graham: Then what happened to you?

Mr. Murphy: We went to Hawaii, a camp in Hawaii.

Mr. Graham: In Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Murphy: I cannot remember the name of the camp we went, just, it was by the pineapple fields in back of Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Graham: How long did you stay there?

Mr. Murphy: It must have been about six weeks, a little more. They loaded us on ships and we went to Tarawa.

Mr. Graham: Tell us something about your trip over on the ship. Was there anything particular that happened then that you still remember?

Mr. Murphy: From San Diego to—

Mr. Graham: No, from Pearl Harbor to Tarawa.

Mr. Murphy: No, it was just a stinkin' mess, seasick every day.

Mr. Graham: The ship was kinda crowded?

Mr. Murphy: Crowded, it was crowded, yes. Very crowded if you want to call it crowded.

Mr. Graham: Please tell us, then, when you got to Tarawa, how were you disembarked and so forth.

Mr. Murphy: When we got to Tarawa, we came in the second day, I didn't come in 'til the evening of the second day. We disembarked by going down over the side of the ship on a rope, rope ladders, they called it, into a landing craft. And we got stuck out there about two hundred yards off, the landing craft, so we had to wade in.

Mr. Graham: And was there, of course I would assume there was still a lot of action going on.

Mr. Murphy: Not as much, well, we came in down at the end of the, Betio or _____??, I can't remember the name now.

Mr. Graham: In other words, the beachhead was established.

Mr. Murphy: The beachhead had been established, most of it. Everything was up to us. All right, we came in on the bottom part of the island.

Mr. Graham: *Grand???* beach. (several words unintelligible)

Mr. Murphy: I guess so. (several words unintelligible) But there was a lot of evidence there.

Mr. Graham: What was the scene like in general What did you see?

Mr. Murphy: Dead marines floatin' around in the water. I was ready to turn around and go back. That's the worst, the first time I'd seen a dead man. A dead marine. From there on we went ashore.

Mr. Graham: Where did you first set up any operations? What part of the island?

Mr. Murphy: Some part of the island in the middle part. Took over an old bunker where we set up our switchboards. And then we did the wire, laid wire on the ground from here to _____?? Two _____?? of way the island. They said that's far enough, that's as far as they wanted at that time. And we went back and put telephones, _____?? to different places, different bunkers, and so forth, just set up communications for PBX switchboards, and so forth.

Mr. Graham: So were you sort of a, just a center of communication where other people came in to you, and then you transferred them on to someone else?

Mr. Murphy: Right. Like switchboards do nowadays.

Mr. Graham: What was it like there for the first week or two after—

Mr. Murphy: I was only on there four days. Once we got the communications set up, the Army came in, I think, the Army or somebody came in.

Mr. Graham: So after the fourth day, you went back to ship.

Mr. Murphy: Went back to ship, went back to Hawaii.

Mr. Graham: Then what did you do, in Hawaii.

Mr. Murphy: From Hawaii we went to the Marshall Islands, Eniwetok. Same thing at Eniwetok almost, except communications, we went in the first day there, at Eniwetok. That was a very small operation.

Mr. Graham: Were you under fire at any time?

Mr. Murphy: Just the first two days, there was some fire, yeah. But we were there about six days. (a few words unintelligible) They sent us down to an island in the Solomon Islands called Majuro, which is the same group of Marshall Islands—

Mr. Graham: How do you spell that Majuro?

Mr. Murphy: M-A-J-U-R-O. There we had to set up communications for a naval base. They made it into a big naval base, the island (a few words unintelligible). We set up our system, we set up telephone lines, just general communications for the whole island. We were there for about six months. We went back from Majuro to the Big Island of Hawaii.

Mr. Graham: The Big Island, not Oahu, the Big Island of Hawaii.

Mr. Murphy: Then we were assigned to a division, sub division, the Twenty-fourth Marines, I believe it was, as their communications, which is what was called ?? company. It was called a bastard outfit. We had no _____?? We couldn't say we were this or that. We'd just go where we had to go.

Mr. Graham: How long were you there?

Mr. Murphy: Let's see, uh, we went there just before Christmas, '44. Then we went to Iwo Jima, sixty-three days on an LST.

Mr. Graham: How did you go ashore there?

Mr. Murphy: Low and crawl, slow, crawling, all the way there.

Mr. Graham: Was the beachhead established yet, or were you—

Mr. Murphy: We were in the third wave. At that time we were assigned to an amphibious artillery outfit, setting up communications for them. I was assigned to a _____?? officer, an SCI three hundred radio operator, forward observation post. The greatest comment I remember from my little colonel was, we got in the boat, lookin' at the island, he says "We're gonna up here, Mt. Surabachi," fairly jazzed up. "It should take us about twenty minutes when we hit the beach." It was two days and twenty minutes later after we hit the beach, we got where he wanted to go. From there on it was just—

Mr. Graham: You said it took you two days. What caused you that long, was it because of the distance or was it because—

Mr. Murphy: Because of the distance, I would say. Because we crawled most of the way up there.

Mr. Graham: Now, were you actually given weapons to where you—

Mr. Murphy: Yes, an M-16 carbine, which you carried along with the radio.

Mr. Graham: So you did some firing along yourself?

Mr. Murphy: Yes.

Mr. Graham: At any time did you all take any prisoners, or, your main objective was to set up that station.

Mr. Murphy: Get the communications going. Get the forward observation post going.

Mr. Graham: Now you say "forward observation post." For the artillery outpost.

Mr. Murphy: The artillery. The colonel went ahead and set up, I called back the coordination of the batteries and so forth, whatever they gave me to call back and set up. Something like, "fire one, fire two, fire _____??" from the ship.

Mr. Graham: How long did you say you were there?

Mr. Murphy: Oh, we went on February the nineteenth, came off March the twelfth.

Mr. Graham: The whole time that you were there you did basically what you did before?

Mr. Murphy: Yes, communications. Digging a hole.

Mr. Graham: Okay, after you got through there you came back to the ship and left?

Mr. Murphy: Came back to the ship, and they took us back Guam for what's called "recreation."

Mr. Graham: R and R?

Mr. Murphy: Recreation, whatever you call it.

Mr. Graham: Rest and recreation.

Mr. Murphy: They took us off to Guam. About twenty miles back in the jungle we built our own camp. That's our recreation.

Mr. Graham: How large a group would say this was, that you went back and had your R and R?

Mr. Murphy: About fifty or sixty.

Mr. Graham: How long did you have your R and R?

Mr. Murphy: R and R consisted of, maybe every other day we'd go on patrol for duds, but we always had to meet Japanese somewhere out there, so nothing more than looking for them, Japanese that were left on the island, we found very few duds.

Mr. Graham: Did some Japanese surrender to you, or did they, all of them, in other words, were still fighting?

Mr. Murphy: They might try to, but they all had an accident, I guess.

Mr. Graham: Then you got through there—

Mr. Murphy: That's in August of '45, and they dropped the bomb. We started counted how we'd get home.

Mr. Graham: Were you still in Guam at this time, when they dropped the bomb?

Mr. Murphy: Yes.

Mr. Graham: Tell us step by step how you ended up back in the States.

Mr. Murphy: Okay. We got to accumulate points. You had so many points for being overseas, actions we had been in to, and so forth. We had to accumulate fifty, I think it was, or something like that, I can't remember the number. Mine came up in October, November, of '45. Came back to San Diego, from San Diego went back to Bainbridge, Maryland for my discharge. December 28th, I think, 29th.

Mr. Graham: Let's go back to the time you were in service to the time you left. Were there any particular people, characters, such, that still stick in your memory, and if so, why?

Mr. Murphy: When I first went to Camp Pendleton, to _____ school, the first thing they did, they

assigned us a buddy. My buddy was Smiley Weiss, from New York. And I never seen him since we went through. The last time I saw him he was _____??

(end of recording)

Transcribed by: Betty Paieda
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