

**Veteran:** **HORN, J. O.**  
**Service Branch:** **Army Air Corps**  
**Interviewer:** York, Ann Marie  
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Interviewer: I am interviewing Mr. J. O. Horn. Are you aware that we are tape recording, and is this alright with you?

Veteran: Sure am, and it's OK.

Interviewer: When were you born, and where?

Veteran: I was in high school when Pearl Harbor was attacked in 1941, and prior to the attack and through communication with our teachers and coaches, we were aware that something was going on. It was announced in our classroom when I was a senior in 1941 that Pearl Harbor was attacked, and of course we were all very upset and disturbed. Right after that, our main head coach and best friend got out of education and joined the service. Then, of course, they started the draft situation.

Interviewer: How about even younger than that. How did you feel about the military as a young boy?

Veteran: I really wasn't concerned about the military at a young age. I was playing high school football, basketball, track, and all these good things. My dad was in World War I, and he had three boys. Of course, we were all aware of what he had been through, and the reasons for war.

Interviewer: Did you tell ya'll much about that war?

Veteran: He told us quite a bit. We'd have to ask most of the time, because they didn't like to talk about it too much. But we'd ask him, and he would tell us. It so happened, that all three of his sons were in World War II. Two of my brothers

were in the Navy, and I was in the Air Force, and we were all in combat in World War II. After I graduated from high school, I was interested in baseball. I had an opportunity to go to college on a football scholarship, but I wanted to play baseball, so I went to baseball school sponsored by the St. Louis Cardinals. There were about 250 of us at this school, and I was one of the 25 that got through all the hard workouts and everything, and made it. The ones that made it were sent to other places, so I was sent to Albany, Georgia, with the St. Louis Cardinals in training camp when I got my induction notice from Uncle Sam.

Interviewer: So you weren't thinking about enlisting at that point?

Veteran: Not at that time, but when I got that notice that "Uncle Sam Needs You." I had an opportunity to sign a contract with the St. Louis Cardinals, but after I got this notice, I decided there was no point in doing this, so I just went on back home to north Louisiana. Five of my good buddies, six of us, all decided to join the Air Force together. We went to basic training in Wichita Falls, Texas, and were there, I guess, for about three months for basic training. After basic training was over, we all scattered. We thought, perhaps, we'd be kept together during this, but it was during war time and they put you where they wanted you and where you were needed. We all applied for officer candidate school; we applied for pilot training school; we applied for gunner school, but since the war had already started by the time we got in, all these schools were full. They didn't need any more pilots or gunners, so we went different directions. After I left basic training in Wichita Falls, I went to Amarillo, Texas, and was there taking electrical training for airplanes for six months. Then I went to Chanute Field, Illinois, and I went to an instrument school there—that was my specialty after I got started in the service. I was an instrument specialist on a C-54 transport plane. After Chanute Field, I came home on my first leave. When I got home I pulled a stunt that some of us did and some didn't—some wish they had, and some wish they had not. I got married. How I met her was she was a school teacher and had gotten out of college about the time I got out of high school. She came to my hometown on her first teaching job, and that's how I met her. After we got married, I stayed home about fourteen days, and then I had to go back and was sent to Hamilton Field in San Francisco, California. While I was at Hamilton

Field, I had gone down into the basement of an eight-story brick building. I went down with one of my buddies, and we went into the supply room to check out our overseas equipment, because we had gotten our orders to go overseas. Just across the hall from the supply room was a recreation room that had pool tables and card tables, we went in there to play around before we left. We started a game of pool in the rec. room and were in there for about fifteen minutes when all of a sudden—WHOP!—everything just blew. We thought the Japs had hit the West Coast. It scared us to death! We were trapped in this building below ground—there were six of us at that time. We found out that the boilers, in the boiler room next to the rec. room, the pop-off valve had evidently stuck and nobody knew it. All of a sudden that thing blew, and we were trapped in there for about forty-five minutes. We thought we'd never get out of there. We thought that was it. After we got out and hit the fresh air, we just nearly passed out. I stayed in the hospital about two months. My wife was teaching school in Logansport, Louisiana—my hometown—so she came out there. Of course, I looked like a mummy because we were burned all over. All you could see was my nose and mouth where they could feed me and I could smell it. That particular time we were fortunate, because they had just come out with sulphur drugs, and that was good for burns. The only scars I've got on me from that explosion is a couple around my knees and on my legs, like a piece of metal had hit me, but no scars from burns. I started losing my hair and thought that was just normal, but it wasn't, because that steam burned our scalps and caused our hair to start coming out. We were standing in water about a foot deep—scalding water from those boilers—and we couldn't get out. We were trapped. Forty-five minutes later, the fire department finally was able to get in there and get us out. While I was in the hospital, I got two other overseas shipping orders but wasn't able to go because of the explosion, so my friend and I stayed in the hospital together. Finally he began to get a little better, and they were fixing to discharge him, but we knew when he was discharged he was going overseas to combat. So, we got in pretty good with the head nurse and asked her what we could do to stay together until I was able to get out of the hospital. So she said, "I'll do you a favor. I'll turn in a little temperature for Raymond each day," and she did, and he stayed in until I was discharged. In the meantime, my wife had come out and stayed with me several

days, and then when I was able to get out of the hospital, she had to go back to Louisiana. I went one way and she went the other way. I went from there to Oakland, California, on my way to Honolulu. That was my first stop before I got into real combat.

Interviewer: How long was it from the time of your training until you actually left?

Veteran: Probably six to eight months. I had gone through a couple of tech schools and basic training. I was in good shape physically until I got in that explosion. Stayed in Honolulu about two weeks at Hickham Field, until we got notice to do what they called “go down under” to the islands in the Pacific where the Japs were eating the people alive. I went from Honolulu down to Johnson Island and ended up on Saipan. I was with all my friends until we got to Cuagalean (?) Island. They needed an instrument specialist there and also needed one at Saipan. I went to Saipan alone.

Interviewer: Were you just trained for instruments or did you actually learn how to use weapons?

Veteran: We were supposedly a non-combat outfit. We were what’s called air transport command. Our responsibility was to go into Saipan and fly the wounded soldiers and Marines that had been wounded on the island taking the island from Japan. We were to fly in and take all the wounded and shell-shocked and fly them back to Honolulu or the United States, whichever was needed. The thing about it is that when we were sent to Saipan there were about 25 in our outfit, and about three four-engine transport planes. That’s what we used to fly them out. We put the patients on litters, and the plane would carry as many as 52 patients. When the planes would come in, our responsibility would be to meet the planes, read all the squawk sheets that the pilots had written down, and whatever it needed, we had to do it, whether it was replace instruments, or electrical work, or whatever.

Interviewer: How did your wife feel about getting married?

Veteran: Well, we hesitated about getting married, but she understood just like my parents did. It had to happen, and at that particular time American service people had to go overseas to fight on foreign soil or they would come over here and fight us

over here, and the American government didn't want to have our wars over here, so we were sent over there. That's why we had wars in the Pacific and Europe. My dad had been in World War I and was very familiar with combat, because he had been wounded in combat. He knew that his three boys were going to have to go.

Interviewer: How did he feel about that?

Veteran: He didn't like it, but there was nothing he could do about it, because they were drafted. Everybody at that age that was physically able to go had to go, so we joined. It was quite a stressful thing, but you get over there into situations like that, you've got to let your hair down and have a little fun, too. A lot of times war was fun, but most of the time it was bad.

Interviewer: What were some of the conditions you saw?

Veteran: The island of Saipan was seven and a half miles wide and fifteen miles long. That was the size of the entire island. Our small outfit went in and established our area close to the runways, and we lived in tents with four people in each one. That's where we lived for eighteen months. When the war started getting a little bit heavy in the Pacific, they were thinking about taking Okinawa and Iwo Jima and all those islands before they got to Japan. They had to have some heavy bombers to do this, so B-29s were brought in from the states, and there must have been 150 of them that landed on Saipan, and that's where they were stationed. They just surrounded our little outfit. I mean, there were B-29s everywhere, and here we were a non-combat outfit. As soon as the Japs found out that the B-29s were landing on Saipan and Guam and Tinian, they started coming in and attacking from the air. They had aircraft carriers out there, too, with fighter planes on them. They couldn't fly from Japan, but they could come from Okinawa and all those islands that we hadn't taken yet. So they started coming in and strafing just above the water where radar would pick them up, and then they'd be right on you before you realized it and start shooting all around you. There we were a non-combat outfit right in the middle of all this mess. During the daytime, we'd get a little bit of warning. The sirens would go off, and sometimes we'd be in the mess hall eating when it would go off. We'd just

scatter. We already had foxholes dug in the old cane fields if we had time to get down to them. Even in our tents, each one of the four of us had foxholes dug by our beds because they were sudden that if we didn't get any warning, we just rolled off our bunks into the foxholes.

Interviewer: How big were your tents?

Veteran: Probably 12x12. They'd accommodate four people if they got along well. All we had, as far as weapons, were pistols and rifles, because that's what we were trained for. I had a rifle strapped on the rack over my cot—all of us did. The mosquitoes were so bad because it rained so much on Saipan, so we all had mosquito nets. I woke up one night with a bad dream, and I was dreaming the Japs had attacked our tent. When I woke up, I was sitting up in my cot, and I had my big knife and was just slashing through my mosquito net, and the mosquitoes nearly carried me off the rest of the night. That was quite an experience. After the island of Saipan was secured, the Marines and the soldiers took the island. We weren't supposed to be in combat, but we were. A lot of the Japs that weren't captured or killed went up into the mountains on Saipan where they had caves and would stay in those caves. At night they would come out and come down to your area to get something to eat. Our showers and restrooms were about fifty yards from our tents, and one afternoon just before dark I had a towel wrapped around me and a pair of moccasins on and a bar of soap—that's all I had—and I was walking along just whistling and happy as I could be and walked around the corner of this building and ran face-to-face with one of the Japs. It scared him as bad as it did me. He went one way and I went the other way, my bar of soap went here, and my towel went this way, and I went back to the tent to get my gun, but he was already gone by the time I got back down there. It was interesting—never a dull moment. We had our own barber and everything. He had his own tent with a chair set up, and he cut everybody's hair. We even had guys that got killed during an air raid that were sitting there getting their hair cut. One of my good friends was getting a haircut when we had a strafing attack, and they shot his big toe off—just tore it off. He was lucky. It was real exciting and interesting.

Interviewer: Do you remember your rank?

Veteran: Master sergeant. I'm sure some of the students have heard through their parents or grandparents about the Bataan Death March. The Japanese took hundreds of American soldiers and did a death march. Ninety percent of them fell dead or they shot them. The ones that survived, after the war was over and they were sending them back, they sent them back to the island of Saipan, and we had to put them on planes. That was the most depressing sight I had seen during the whole war, and they were skin and bones. Some of them didn't have legs, some didn't have arms, and it was just pitiful.

Interviewer: Did you know where any of your brothers or friends were during the war? Did you have communication with them?

Veteran: My two brothers were in the Pacific, like I was, but they were both in the Navy. They were on ships, and I was on Saipan. One of my brothers came to Saipan, but he came, I think, about seven days after I had left to go back to Honolulu. I didn't get to see either one of them during the war, but I had a friend from my hometown that I got to visit with. He was in the Navy and was stationed at Saipan. He was on an aircraft tender. If airplanes crashed out in the ocean, they'd try to repair them or whatever. I had several meals with him on the ship, and they had excellent meals where we didn't.

Interviewer: What kind of meals did you have compared to them?

Veteran: We had fried Spam and powdered eggs for breakfast and stuff like that, and no milk. They had all kinds of good meats and vegetables. The sailors lived well. They had it good.

Interviewer: Did ya'll have pretty much the same food all the time or did you have any variety?

Veteran: After the war was over, we had pretty decent food. We even had fresh eggs after the wars were over. We'd get up at two o'clock in the morning to go eat fresh eggs, because we had missed it so much.

Interviewer: Did you ever write home to your Mom and Dad? How did that work?

Veteran: It was slow, but they would get it sooner or later. My wife was the same thing, and she and I corresponded all the time I was over there. It might take sometimes two or three weeks before you'd get a letter or a package, like cookies or something. A lot of times it might be crumbs by the time it would get there.

Interviewer: What kind of things would they say in their letters?

Veteran: Just tried to cheer you up and tell you everything was in good shape back home. They'd wish me well, and they'd be there when it was all over. Communication was slow, but you'd get it.

Interviewer: Did ya'll ever have a day off or a time of rest when where you could go out somewhere?

Veteran: Not until the wars were over. I was on the island of Saipan when both wars ended—our war in Europe and the war in the Pacific. I spent a total of eighteen months on Saipan. It was kind of unfortunate that I did, because we were supposed to have been rotated. We were supposed to stay on one island six months, and then they were supposed to send you back to Honolulu for R&R, rest and recreation, but things got so busy down there that we didn't have time for all of that, so most of us stayed for eighteen months. We had to something after both wars ended, because we didn't have any specific duties. We were just sort of there waiting to go home. We had been playing volleyball and softball, and were the volleyball champions of the island of Saipan. Our commanding officer was a pilot and had a plane assigned to him, so we would fly down to Guam and then over to Tinian and other islands to play those guys in softball and volleyball. That took a lot of our time and kept it from totally wiping us out.

Interviewer: Did you see many battles?

Veteran: Even though we were non-combat, we were in combat during those staffing and bombing attacks. The Japanese bombers were coming over and bombing Saipan after we got there. That's why we had to have those foxholes. They were trying to destroy all the B-29s, because they new the B-29s sooner or later were going to

take off and head for Okinawa and Iwo Jima and finally Japan. Anytime new B-29s would come into the island, we could expect air raids all night long and sometimes during the daytime. I saw several people get hit by bullets from strafing attacks. We were just lucky, that's all. We had a lot of Marines and soldiers on the island that secured it from the Japanese. A lot of them were shell shocked, and as fast as we could send them back to Honolulu and the states, that's what we were doing. I was standing in front of a plane one day, and the planes were serviced and ready to go. The medical corps brought out several patients to put on there, and a lot of them were shell shocked. I saw this young man just stray away from the group. The pilots had already gotten in there and had the four propellers going, and they were ready to go. I looked up and saw this guy walking toward the front of the plane and said to myself, "What's wrong here?" Then I realized he had come out of the that medical group that was supposed to be loaded on the plane and was shell shocked—he didn't know what was going on. I caught him just about two feet before he hit one of those propellers—he was walking right into it! He never knew what happened, but it scared the devil out of me. One of the tragic things I saw on the island of Saipan was when we had a typhoon. They're similar to a hurricane, but they're really worse when they hit little islands like that. We had one plane loaded with 52 passengers and they were headed out to Honolulu. They'd gotten out about probably 75 or 100 miles from Saipan, and they ran into a typhoon. They knew the weather was coming and it was bad, but they were trying to get out ahead of it, but they didn't make it. They had to turn around and come back to Saipan. When they got back, everything was storming at that particular time. They missed the runway, and everybody was killed but one person, and that was the copilot, and some of the guys just happened to get him out of the cockpit before it blew up and caught on fire. It was just torn to threads. It blew the tops of the passenger terminals and records were just destroyed. A lot of times, when those B-29s came to Saipan they would go to Okinawa and Iwo Jima and those islands between Saipan and Japan. They had to get those to get those Japanese off of those islands, so we saw as many as 250 B-29s take off about 3 minutes apart. One particular day, eleven of them just ditched into the water. They all had to go over the ocean because the island was so small. Eleven of those planes, and they had a crew of twelve on

each, and they just hit the water and sunk. Most of the guys got out—some of them didn't, but you've got about thirty seconds to get when a plane ditches into the water that way, or you go down with it. You'd be surprised how many people can get out of that thing in thirty seconds.

Interviewer: I know you saw a lot of wounded people, but were you ever wounded in any way besides the boiler room that day?

Veteran: No, I had it rougher in San Francisco than on the island of Saipan. I wasn't wounded, but I had nervous tension at night like everybody else. I was bothered with my stomach, and I went to the doctor several times, and he said it was just a nervous stomach. I went on and accepted it, but it was uncomfortable for quite awhile. After I got back to states, the first place I went was to the hospital in Shreveport, Louisiana, to see what was wrong, and my appendix were in backwards, and they had begun to wrap around my intestines a little bit, and that's what was causing the severe pain, and I thought it was a nervous stomach and had fought it for about twelve months. As soon as I saw that doctor in Shreveport, he said, "Let's get it out now," so I had an appendectomy as soon as I got back to the states. The doctors in the military were baby doctors, foot doctors, they were every kind of doctor in the world. If you went in with a headache, a foot ache, a bellyache, they gave you the same thing for all three. Anything to get you going or get you out.

Interviewer: How about your brothers? Did they have any bad experiences?

Veteran: They did. As I said, they were both in the Navy, and both of them saw combat. My oldest brother was a gunner on destroyers and also an electrician, and he had three ships shot out from under him. He lost a lot of friends, but he survived all three of them. The only thing was he was really affected was in his hearing. Their responsibility was to get as close as they could to those islands that were still occupied with Japanese, and they'd shell hour after hour. You've seen these big guns on these battleships and destroyers, time after time when they're hitting those islands it's just noise all the time. Even earplugs didn't do any good. Other than that, we all made it back home. It was kind of a coincidence that our dad and all three of his sons saw combat and we all four got back alive.

Interviewer: You're very lucky.

Veteran: I'm telling you—really, really.

Interviewer: How did you feel when you heard the war was over? Do you remember where you were?

Veteran: Absolutely. Like I said, I was on the island of Saipan when both wars were over. The only celebration we had was we drank a few beers. There wasn't much celebration, and there wasn't much to do. We were just anxious to get home. When the wars ended, we were there, so we had to just kill time until they got to us and sent us back home. During this time, I guess I was fortunate in a way but my wife wasn't that fortunate, but she had to have surgery, and the same doctor in Shreveport that took my appendix out after I got home removed a goiter from her neck. He didn't want to do it at first because I was still on Saipan and it was a serious surgery, and he thought I should be there. Of course the Red Cross is supposed to be such a famous "help your buddy" thing, and my wife, in Shreveport, and me in Saipan, both went to the Red Cross, and they turned my leave down and said I couldn't go home. They decided it wasn't a major surgery. Just to show you how politics works, my wife was a school teacher and taught with a young lady whose brother was a representative or senator in the state of Louisiana, and she said she would talk to her brother. In the meantime I had been sent from Saipan back to Honolulu, because after the Red Cross had turned it down, I had just about given up on it. About 48 hours after she talked to her brother, a cablegram came to Hickham in Honolulu that said, "Let James O. Horn catch the next plane out for Louisiana." So that's what I did. I got home, and she had her surgery, then I had to wait about a month before I got my discharge in Shreveport. In the meantime, after she had her surgery and got in good shape I decided I'd have something done to this appendix, and I did that and was just fine. After that, I went and got my discharge and got back into civilian life.

Interviewer: How long was it from the time the war was over to when you got to come home?

Veteran: Months. The last war was over in August 1945. During all this time was when she was getting ready for that surgery and I had already gone back to Honolulu. I

came home and flew over the Golden Gate Bridge in December 1945, and I was on my way home. About four or five months all together.

Interviewer: Was there any type of celebration when you finally returned home?

Veteran: Just a family celebration. All the big celebrations had already taken place while I was still on Saipan. I wasn't looking for a celebration. I was looking for my wife and my parents. All of the boys from my hometown got home at different times anyway, so they couldn't plan much celebration.

Interviewer: Did you have contact with any of your friends after you got home?

Veteran: Oh, yeah. A lot of the guys I volunteered with way back before we went overseas, they were all back home, and we started going our separate ways. I worked at a couple of different jobs after I got out of the service. I just had a high school education when I went into baseball. I realized I didn't know how to do anything and wasn't getting anywhere, and my wife already had her degree and was teaching. I always wanted to be a football coach or just a coach of any sports, because I participated in everything in high school, so my wife and I decided that we would get rid of everything we had and go to Stephen F. Austin in Nacogdoches, and I'd get my degree. We moved there and I got my bachelors degree in two years and eight months. I went through and took everything I could get, and I think I got a whole semester's credit for some of the tech schools that I had attended in the Air Force. I got my first job coaching and teaching, and later on we both went back to Stephen F. and got our master's degrees and went from there.

Interviewer: Did you receive any special awards or medals after the war?

Veteran: Nothing but what we called 'oatmeal clusters.' You got a combat ribbon for being in combat, and there were two or three minor ribbons that we got that we really didn't want. We wanted to get home; we weren't interested in medals. Some of them had medals all over them, and that's when we started calling them 'oatmeal clusters.' I never got any special awards. When you leave the service, they talk to you about staying in the reserves. I said, "Don't even talk to me about the reserves. Just give me my discharge and let me get out of here."

Today, one of my golfing buddies is a general and one's a lieutenant colonel in the reserves. They're just guys I've met playing golf. I call the one that's a general 'Sarge.'

Interviewer: Do you have any other stories or memories that you'd like to share?

Veteran: Not really. I was so glad to get home and get a life started since I was married. I was anxious to get back and get a job and start a family, and that's what we did.

Interviewer: How much total time were you gone?

Veteran: Overseas, it was only twenty months all together, but I spent eighteen months on Saipan. Spent about two weeks in Honolulu before I went to Saipan, and then another two weeks on Honolulu when I got back before I came home.

Interviewer: Thank you very much. I guess that about covers it.

Veteran: Well, I enjoyed it. I probably missed a lot of things. You'll have to check my English after you replay it. Glad to do it.

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