Veteran:	**STOVALL, Jr., Jesse F.**
Service Branch:	**MARINE CORPS**
Interviewer:	Contreras, Francisco
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Highlights of Service:	**World War II; Served in Okinawa, Japan, & China**

Interviewer: Today is Monday, April 29, 2002. My name is Francisco Contreras, and I am here with Mr. Stovall. We are conducting this interview at his home. Before we continue, sir, I want you to be aware that your conversation is being recorded, as you see, and that the tape and transcription will be placed in the Lee College library. Do I have permission to do that, sir?

Veteran: Yes.

Interviewer: Where you born and raised, sir?

Veteran: I was born in Hearne, Texas, and I was raised there until I was 17 years old.

Interviewer: Were you drafted or did you enlist?

Veteran: I volunteered.

Interviewer: How old were you when you volunteered?

Veteran: I was 17 years old.

Interviewer: Were you married or had a family at the time?

Veteran: No.

Interviewer: How did your family feel about you enlisting?

Veteran: My dad didn't really show all that much concern, but my mother was deathly opposed to it. She didn't care for me to go. In fact, when I told my dad that I was going to volunteer for the Marine Corps, he said, "Let me tell your mother." When he told her about eleven o'clock one night, I heard the entire

conversation.—it was on a Thursday, I believe. He evidently convinced her, because Saturday morning we went and enlisted in the Marine Corps—June 8, 1944.

Interviewer: Did you have to have parental consent?
Veteran: Yes.

Interviewer: So youR father talked her into it.
Veteran: Evidently he must have. She and I never discussed it.

Interviewer: Where did you do your basic training?
Veteran: We called it boot camp, and it was in Pearsall, South Carolina.

Interviewer: How long did it last?
Veteran: In that timeframe, it was ten weeks. I was there a little longer, because I fooled around and caught pneumonia, so I was in the hospital for thirty-one days. I was actually in South Carolina for about twelve or fourteen weeks.

Interviewer: Did you go in the summer or winter?
Veteran: I went in the fall.

Interviewer: Right after boot camp, where did you go?
Veteran: They sent me Camp Lejune, North Carolina, and then they allowed me to come home for a leave. Everybody west of the Mississippi got a fifteen day leave. Back in those days you traveled by train or bus, so it took me three days to get here and two days to get back, so it didn't leave me with but ten days at home. Then I reported back to Camp Lejune, North Carolina, and stayed there for about two or three weeks, and then they put us on a troop train and brought us across the United States, and we went to Camp Pendleton, California. We were scheduled for some training there. As I understand it now that I've read the history after the war was over with, we were actually training for a hit on the Japanese mainland, but it became pretty evident that that wasn't going to be necessary in that timeframe. Because of my sickness, I missed Iwo Jima. The

last campaign was going to be Okinawa, and we were training in Hawaii for the Japanese mainland. They picked us up there and carried us to Guam, and from there we went to Okinawa.

Interviewer: So, before you took off while you were in boot camp, what was the most grueling part of your training?

Veteran: Well, of course from the physical standpoint, the obstacle courses, the judo training, and the hand-to-hand combat. That was very vigorous. I didn't weight but 145 pounds when I got there, and I ate so much that I weighed 170 when I left fourteen weeks later. We did a lot of physical activity—more-so than I had ever thought. That didn't bother me as much, because I was in pretty good shape, but it was the mental strain. You're being taught to look out for Number 1. They teach a young man that you need to protect yourself. If your buddy falls next to you, that's just tough. In fact, the Marine Corps motto is *Semper Fidelis*, which means always faithful, but they changed I around a little bit and said, "I got mine, you get yours," because they can't afford to allow you to go over there and be so concerned about everybody else. You're liable to get yourself killed.

Interviewer: It's a state of mind that I would assume you have to have when you're down there, and it probably saved your life in the long run.

Veteran: Like I said, it wasn't physical strain, but mentally it was a lot of stress. They really put you through it.

Interviewer: Did boot camp mentally prepare you for what was ahead.

Veteran: A great portion of it, because they were so in need of people to be in training for the assault on the Japanese mainland that they didn't give us all that much training. They were more interested in getting us over there. Of course, things slowed down a little bit after we got to Camp Pendleton for me, because out of a replacement draft of some 1300 Marines, the mothers were complaining about the young boys getting killed overseas. I had become 18 years of age, but as a result of that, me and another friend got put out of the replacement draft because we were too young to go overseas. We stayed there at Camp Pendleton another two or three weeks until the clamor died down, and we were allowed to go into

another replacement draft, but we went out with total strangers. There were none of the people we trained with.

Interviewer: But you did have your friend with you.

Veteran: Oh, yes. As a sideline, we always said that there was generals that had specific jobs. One of them's job was that if they found out that you like where you were, they came and moved you, and the other ones job was that if you had a friend that you really liked, they split you up. His name was Strickland and my name was Stovall, so we thought that because we started with "st" that we'd never be split up. They called us out one day and had us count off "1-2-1-2," and I was 1 and he was 2, and so he went into some kind of an amphibious operation, and I went into a replacement draft and went overseas. I went to Honolulu, Hawaii, then to Guam. While we were there on Guam, they picked up 210 of us, and we went to Okinawa. The operation there had already started, and so we didn't get in on the first wave, but we went in a little place we later found out was called Kuba and proceeded to go inland, and then everything kind of wound down. Seemed like every operation had a suicide to it—that's where the Japanese soldier jumped over the side of a cliff and committed suicide on the rocks there. It all wound up on June 6, 1945.

Interviewer: What was your state of mind while you were on the way to Okinawa? Were you scared? Did you really have an idea what you were heading into?

Veteran: Mentally, you had been prepared for that. There was a degree of fright, but that's what keeps you alive—more alert to what was going on. Whenever the bullets start popping the rocks, or whenever you hear them zinging by it gets your attention. It really will. You know you've got yourself in a real war.

Interviewer: Did you ever regret enlisting?

Veteran: Never. I never did. I had to sign up for a four-year hitch—they wouldn't take you as a reserve because they could see the war was gonna wind down before too long, so I signed up for four years. I served my time, and I still support the Marine Corps—both of the ROTCs here at the schools. My birthday is November 10th, and I still go to the schools and celebrate with the ROTC groups.

This cap was given to me by my boy a couple of Christmases ago. He was killed last year in a home fire, so there's not enough money to buy this thing.

Interviewer: I'm sorry to hear that. You stated in your questionnaire that you went to the Asiatic Pacific. Did you go there before Okinawa?

Veteran: The entire battle was declared Asiatic Pacific. That's anything that's of Asian descent. There was a lot of Japanese on all of those islands. I think that's the reason they called it the Asiatic Pacific.

Interviewer: For the most part then, you were in Okinawa.

Veteran: That's the only engagement that I was in, but I was at Honolulu, Maui Island, Guam, Saipan, and then went from there to Okinawa, but then I was also in the Philippines, and I spent a lot of time just in Japan and China.

Interviewer: At the time you were there, what time of year was it?

Veteran: I never did see any cold weather from June 8, 1944, until I got back to the states in 1947. Everyplace I went it was pleasant or hot—one of the two. The jungles we were in were hot and sticky. I guess it did get a little cool in Japan, but I don't remember it every being cold.

Interviewer: Did you encounter your first conflict in Okinawa?

Veteran: Yes, and that was really the only conflict I was in. We stopped off in Guam while there still thirty to forty-thousand Japanese there, but it was a secured island and had been secured for some period of time. In fact, we were standing in the chow line to get supper one afternoon, and a Japanese walked out of the woods. Come over and got in line with us—his dogs and everything. They let him get all the way up to the chow line and then they took him. They fed him, but they took him. That's what they were trying to do to get them to surrender, and to let them know that the war was over. In Okinawa, it was the same way. We had a mop-up operation there. The war was over there in June, or at least the island was declared secure in June, but there was still a hundred and some-odd thousand Japanese, and so we went out to the caves trying to get them to surrender. There was fighting after June 6th. In fact, the last Japanese just gave

up about four years ago. He'd been holed up in those caves all these years, and finally realized the war was over. Got to be an old man all by himself. It was really more than four years ago—probably about 1992 or 1993. We had the initial conflict and securing of the island, but you still had a war going on, because you had to try to get them to surrender. A lot of 'em did, some of 'em didn't.

Interviewer: So were you basically there to try to hold down Okinawa?

Veteran: Yeah, after the island was declared secure, I stayed there until October of 1945. They signed the peace, I think, on September 2nd, but we were still there. I believe I left there about October 4th, and went to Sasabo, Japan. I think I got over there in May and was there until October.

Interviewer: So, you weren't on any offensive operation?

Veteran: Well, the whole thing was an offensive mission. Yes, we actually went around to Naha, which was some forty miles, and we were pushing the Japanese all the way. Did I get shot at? Yes, I got shot at many times. Did I shoot? Yes, I shot many times.

Interviewer: What was your most frightening moment?

Veteran: It was really after securing the island. We were trying to get the Japanese to surrender. We'd go down through the caves and down along the seashore over there. One day we were going to a cave—at least we knew it was a cave. It was small hole there, but when you went in those things, you go into a room that was several thousand cubic feet of space in this mountain that they'd hollowed out. When we were down there, somebody up on a hill started shooting at us, and we were right out in the open, and there wasn't anything that we could do except to scramble as best we could. What we did was climb in this hole—went into the cave, and then eventually we went through this thing and came out on top and then we could see who was firing at us.

Interviewer: Nobody was in the cave?

Veteran: No, but they had been there.

Interviewer: You said there was shooting at that time. Did anyone get hit?

Veteran: No. There was eight or nine of us and none of us got hit. They were terrible shots.

Interviewer: You did witness casualties?

Veteran: Yeah, lots of them.

Interviewer: Anybody close?

Veteran: Not really, since I went out with replacement draft. I wasn't there with anyone I had trained with. I'd only been with them a few months, and didn't get to know them that well.

Interviewer: I guess that probably was good in a way.

Veteran: I guess it was.

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Interviewer: How did you feel about the United States dropping the atomic bomb?

Veteran: I probably wouldn't be sitting here talking to you if they hadn't dropped it, because if we hadn't determined that there wasn't going to be any need to attack the Japanese mainland, that's where I would have been. Everything I can read and even some of the things that they were telling us then, they were expecting 90% casualties. If you'd go to Japan, you'd understand why, because there just aren't any beaches there. It's mostly mountains and hills where you'd go in. They just don't have any flat land, and we would have had a terrible time getting up some of those hills, or volcanic formations. After having the opportunity of going there and seeing what it was like, it would have been just about like it was that day we were down along that seashore, which really wasn't a beach. We were walking on rocks when those people started shooting at us. At Japan, they'd have had the high ground and would have probably blown most of those LCIs—landing craft infantry—out of the water. They never would have made it to the beach, so I was thankful they had dropped it. If they hadn't, there would have

been a lot of casualties. They killed enough Americans during World War II, but they'd have killed more there than they'd already killed. It was going to be horrendous. Okinawa was bad enough. They had kamikaze attacks, and then they had the Japanese forces that had the high ground. It was a volcanic mass, too. You just really can't explain it.

Interviewer: Many people bring up the point about whether it was the right thing to do—morally.

Veteran: How many countries do you think that weeks or days before, they actually dropped leaflets to let the people know what was going to happen, so they'd have an opportunity to get out of there. They had to show them the strength that they had or they never would have gotten them to surrender. Even now, you can see people that don't put as much value on life as Americans do, and the Japanese had a lot of those. The had 'saki attacks,' where they'd attack in the middle of the night, and there was a lot of that there. But those people were warned many times that there was going to be a bomb dropped there and it was going to be devastated, but they didn't believe it was going to happen, so some of them suffered as a result. But it's just a part of war. Like Patton said, he didn't want any of his people to die for America. He wanted them other sons-o-bitches to die. You're either gonna live and they're gonna die, or they're gonna live and you're gonna die. That's war. It's a shame that people get themselves in that kind of position. It's primarily greed that causes that kind of thing. People don't have too much sympathy because the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. What were we doing then? We weren't even in the war. I had a brother-in-law that was in the Scofield barracks that's lucky to be alive today. I guarantee you one thing, they didn't drop any leaflets to let you know they were going to bomb us.

Interviewer: Did you get to witness firsthand any damage from the atomic bomb?

Veteran: Yes. I've given talks in years past to both my company and other people that I walked to the center of two cities that had completely disappeared. There wasn't two bricks on top of one another. When I got there in October of 1945, the Japanese were out there in the middle of it already building stuff back.

Interviewer: What was Japan like after the war?

Veteran: They were very receptive. I discussed it the best I could with the Japanese, because we were on the beach quite a bit. {END OF SIDE A}

{SIDE B BEGINS}

…They said that America won the war, so they had their rights. If we had won the war, we'd have had our rights. This was kind of the approach that they had. I think for the most part, people were living together real well, because I felt no animosity at all. I was in the Japanese cities all the way from Sasabo, that's on the island of Kyushu, up to Tokyo Harbor. I rode their train with them, and I didn't find any animosity. In fact, you could really make a friend if you'd give 'em a cigarette, and a real good friend if you'd sell 'em a pack of cigarettes, which we could do. They didn't cost us but a nickel, and they'd beg you for it. They'd give the equivalent of five or ten dollars.

Interviewer: I find it very interesting that they didn't hold a grudge.

Veteran: Well, if they did they didn't show it. I didn't carry an arm or anything.

Interviewer: So, you didn't feel threatened?

Veteran: Not at all. Never did, and we walked down the streets with them. We had our own entertainment centers, as far as USO clubs and what have you. We didn't go to their dances or anything like that. I thought they accepted us very well.

Interviewer: Did you at any time get to go to China?

Veteran: Yes, I did. I went to China early in 1946. When they picked me up in Okinawa, I went to replace Marines that had enough points to get out on the USS *Wichita*. They had Marine detachments on the cruisers, and battleships, and aircraft carriers, so I became a part of a Marine detachment aboard the USS *Wichita*, which housed the flag of Rear Admiral Feron(?), who was a commander of the cruiser and destroyer division. I became a part of his flag bodyguard. Whenever I went over on the beach with him, I carried a gun, but whenever I went over there just for a liberty, I didn't. I went from the *Wichita* to the *Baltimore*, because the *Wichita* was coming back to the states with Admiral Feron(?). He was

coming back to the states for the atomic bomb test down at Anewetok, and he told me, "Son, I can't take you back with me, because I just have a third class priority. I'm probably gonna have to ride on a gasoline can, and so you're gonna have to stay out here with Capt. Bryson(?)," who was the chief of staff. Capt. Bryson and I, and a few of the other flag members transferred to the USS *Baltimore*. I was over there about two or three weeks, I guess, and then I transferred to the USS *Atlanta*. I had been told that I was going over on the beach and report to Admiral Nimitz to be his orderly, and I was hoping I would get that job, but that never did materialize, so I stayed on the USS *Atlanta*. As a result of that, we were given some assignments in China. We went to Sing Tao, and then up the Yangtze River to Shanghai. We were there in Sing Tao before the communists actually took over China—this was in 1946. They were outside of Sing Tao, but I didn't see any real action.

Interviewer: Were the Chinese grateful for the United States defeating the Japanese?

Veteran: I'm sure they were, but we didn't ever discuss anything like that. I was with them just about like I was in Japan with the Japanese. When I was there, I was just interested in seeing the sights. I didn't have too many opportunities to see things in Shanghai, China—a beautiful old town with the narrow streets, quiet sidewalks, riding in the rickshaws. It was real interesting. People made their living by pulling rickshaws all day long—thousands of them. Pick you out one, get in it, and go.

Interviewer: I guess the culture must have been very interesting.

Veteran: It was. I have said many times that I wouldn't take any overseas assignment with my company unless they offered me one in China. I did go overseas for Exxon, but not for any long-duration job. I went to England and Germany, Belgium and Holland.

Interviewer: Do you keep in touch with anyone that you were stationed with?

Veteran: I do keep in touch with the people I served with on the *Atlanta*. I don't have contact with any of my friends when I was an infantryman on Okinawa. I've lost contact with every one of them. Never did see Strickland any more—that's the

one that I counted off 1-2-1-2 with. That was the last person that I had trained with through boot camp and the little training that I got there in Camp Pendleton. I don't have any contact with anyone that I actually packed a rifle with. I do, though with some of the seagoing Marines. There's about 14 of us still alive out of 39. We still meet once a year. We met in Cleveland, Ohio, last year. We're going to be going to Delaware this year, and went to Las Vegas the year before, and then San Diego the year before that. They found me in 1989, because I had moved here to Baytown. I had a friend that stopped in Hearne, Texas, in the 1970s, at a service station that I used to work at when I was a teenager, and asked a fellow for a phone book. He gave it to him, and when this guy started to go through it, he said, "Who are you looking for, and he said, "I'm looking for a Stovall." He said, "There's none of them here. They all moved down to the coast. I don't really know where they live, and I don't have any of their addresses," and so he left. I had served with him on the USS *Atlanta*. Then in 1988 or 1989, he went back through Hearne, and at that same service station he asked for a phone book, and they gave him one. He looked through it, and my brother had moved back up there, so he found a Stovall and called him. Bob told him my telephone number, and so he called me that night. He said, "Is this Jess Stovall?" I said, "That's right." He said, "Is this a fella that used to go by the nickname of Smoky?," and I said, "That's right." He said, "Do you know a Braxton?" I said, "The only one I'd ever known was a Bob Braxton that I'd served with in the Marine Corps." He said, "You're talking to him." He said they were gonna have a reunion in Philadelphia in September—this was about July of that year. I said that I'd be there, so this is when I got reacquainted with everybody. Like I say, there's about 14, 15, or 16 of us left. I've got email addresses on about 7 or 8 of them, so we keep in touch.

Interviewer: Of your experiences in World War II, what was the one thing that you'd most like to forget?

Veteran: I think the Okinawa campaign. I haven't gone into very much detail about what I did there, but that's one thing I don't like to think about really. The rest wasn't all that bad, but that part of it was that six months I was there.

Interviewer: Have you seen any war movies that kind of bring you back to that experience?

Veteran: I've watched *Midway*, and, you know they made *The D.I.*, which isn't a war movie but a training film; Jack Webb was a drill sergeant—I have that tape and watch it, and I can relive what I went through went I was 17 years old. Then I used to watch *Combat* whenever it was on TV back in the 60s, with Vic Morrow as a sergeant in the war. That's kind of the way you look at your life. I kind of think that's my life with all of the things I've seen, all the deaths that have occurred, I just think that's just another combat.

Interviewer: Was it hard adjusting to civilian life once you came back?

Veteran: It wasn't really all that easy. There was a different mentality in America, and there always was. I can remember when we finally got the opportunity to come back to the states, when we sailed into the harbor out there in Los Angeles, they had a big sign that said "Welcome Home—Well Done." We met the Catalina ferry, and of course we were happy to see an American, and we hollered at 'em, but they didn't pay any attention to us. Whenever we got back to the dock there in Los Angeles, people had already forgotten there was a war in that length of time, and treated you like they'd just rather forget.

Interviewer: It must have been very disappointing.

Veteran: It was disgusting. I know how the young men felt from Vietnam, because I saw some of it from a war that—if there's such a thing—it was a popular war. I saw how we got treated after we got back, and the war hadn't been over but about a little of a year or something like that. We were just a necessary evil by then, the way they treated us. The men from Vietnam, they treated them worse than that. They spit on them and abused them when they came back.

Interviewer: Getting off the subject a little bit, do you feel that the event on September 11 united the country like World War II did?

Veteran: It's the closest thing I've seen since they bombed Pearl Harbor. It really did. I think it's dissipated pretty fast. A lot of people don't even want to mention patriotism. I was just reading my American Legion book, and one of the things people have been asked to do in school is not talk about patriotism, but I'm still

patriotic. I'd like to have a Congress that would say what is best for America, not what is best for my party, or what's best for my agenda. They've got some of the same mentality I was talking about while ago that we had. "I've got mine, you get yours." I was just reading an article in that book, and it said that last year we had to work until May 3rd before we paid all the taxes we owed, but now that's gone up to May 17th, and they said that if your really studied it and thought about it, you're also paying $718 billion in regulations for these big companies. All I can see is that they have an agenda, and they don't really care what's best for America. I worked in industry for fifty years, and I was born and raised in a petrochemical home, and for the life of me I can't see how anybody could use the arguments that are used about not drilling or finding all of the oil that they possibly could in America—whatever the reason—so that we wouldn't be dependent on somebody else. Not even that—so that we'd have their oil. What is there about a piece of land that they voted on last week not to disturb that nobody's going to see. Can't anybody live up there but the caribou. They said that the Alaska pipeline was going to disturb the caribou. They didn't disturb them too much—in fact, I think they like that warm pipeline there that they can lay up against whenever it gets cold up there in the wintertime. I don't have much sympathy for those that stand in the way of progress because of whatever their agenda is.

Interviewer: We're about ready to wrap this up. Is there anything you'd like to add before we finish?

Veteran: No. I've probably talked too much already. I enjoy thinking about what we discussed here tonight, because it's a part of my growing up. The one thing that I can say is I never have depended on anybody else. I started working when I was 11 years old and always had some sort of a job, so I've always done it all myself. I believe I could have done it, no matter what the circumstances might have been. I think people could be more assertive in their pursuit of their well-being so that nobody else has to take care of them. I hate to think that we're taxing people to take care of somebody else that doesn't really care if they work.

Interviewer: Well, Mr. Stovall, I want to thank you very much. I appreciate the time and effort you helped me put into this project. Once again, it's been an honor knowing you and meeting you, and it's very interesting that I get to have a little feel for what happened.

Veteran: What I've told you here tonight is probably something that I never have told anybody else. Not this extensive. They know I was in the Marine Corps, and I'm proud of that, but I don't think you'd have to know me too long until you'd find out that I did serve. I'm proud of the fact that I did have an opportunity to serve the country that I served. I think I was patriotic before I went into the Marine Corps, but I've sure been since then. I enjoy the memorial service that they have on May 30th every year, and I enjoy the Veterans Day service that they have on November 11th every year. I still attend all of those. I think I had something to do with the veteran's memorial at Bicentennial Park. It was Dr. Victory's idea, and I'm glad that we finally got something there. I think it's a pretty place.

Interviewer: Once again, Mr. Stovall, thank you very much, and I really appreciate it.

Veteran: You're more than welcome.

Interviewer: I really enjoyed it. Thanks again.

Veteran: Yes sir.

{TAPE STOPPED—END OF INTERVIEW}