Veteran:	**TAVARY, Raymond**
Service Branch:	**MARINE CORPS**
Interviewer:	Sheldon, Jessica
Date of Interview:	April 25, 2002
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Transcriptionist:	Terry Moore
Highlights of Service:	**World War II; Served on Guadalcanal on B-24 reconnaissance plane as flight engineer**

Interviewer: My name is Jessica Sheldon. I am interviewing Raymond Tavary about his World War II experiences. It is April 25, 2002, and we are at his home. Are you aware that the conversation will be recorded, and that the tape and transcription will be placed in the Lee College library? Do I have your permission to do that?

Veteran: Yes.

Interviewer: Were you in the military before the war started?

Veteran: No.

Interviewer: Were you drafted or did you volunteer?

Veteran: I joined the Marine Corps. At the time you had the reserves or the regular Marine Corps, and I joined the regular Marine Corps, so you automatically had to serve four years.

Interviewer: What made you do it?

Veteran: On account of Pearl Harbor, I guess in a way. But me and a buddy of mine were getting all of our stuff together, and we were going to go to Canada and join the Royal Canadian Air Force. In the meantime, before we got all of our paperwork and everything done—school transcripts and everything—well, we got in a war, so we joined the Marine Corps.

Interviewer: How old were you when you did this?

Veteran: 19.

Interviewer: Would you mind telling me about your friend?

Veteran: Well, really after we got through boot camp, I lost track of him. He went one way, and I went the other way. To this day, I don't know where he is. I know he didn't get killed, but I don't know where he is.

Interviewer: Where did you train at?

Veteran: San Diego.

Interviewer: And what kind of stuff did they teach you when you were training?

Veteran: Just marching, shooting rifles, shooting pistols, learning how to take orders, and how to give orders when you got out. Stuff like that. Just regular drills.

Interviewer: How long did that last?

Veteran: Nine weeks.

Interviewer: Did you have to do any training overseas?

Veteran: No, not overseas. You were already trained in what you had to do when you got over there.

Interviewer: What was your title?

Veteran: I was a master technical sergeant when I got out. I was a PFC when I went over.

Interviewer: What were your duties?

Veteran: I was a flight engineer on a B-24.

Interviewer: What's a flight engineer?

Veteran: They have to see that the plane is ready to fly, and if anything goes wrong in the air and if it's possible to fix it, then it's up to you to do it. Of course, there's a lot of things that you can't do, but that's your main thing. We were in a photo reconnaissance squadron, and what we'd do is fly over the different islands and the photographers would take pictures, and then you would see where the

Japanese had their ships and all that stuff. Then the intelligence would take that and decide which way they would go. Like one time, they knew the Japanese were sending fighter planes over to Guadalcanal, but there weren't any carriers out there, and they didn't know how they had enough fuel for the distance to go to hit Guadalcanal. We were flying, I think it was over Russell Islands, and we went over there four or five different times taking pictures, and one time when they got back and were looking at the pictures—there wasn't nothing over there but coconut trees, you know—they discovered they had these coconut trees on trailers and they would move them out of the way so the fighter planes could land on the strip, take off, and then whenever they got back, they'd put 'em back on there. And when you fly over it, it just looked like nothing but a coconut plantation. One of the guys just spotted these trees weren't lined up exactly like they were those other times they flew over, and what they did when they put 'em back in, they didn't have 'em in exactly the same place. So our fighter planes went over there and started strafing it and got rid of all of them.

Interviewer: When you flew over them, did you ever get shot at by the enemy?

Veteran: Not by airplanes but with antiaircraft fire, but they weren't very accurate with it.

Interviewer: What's antiaircraft fire?

Veteran: That's guns on the ground where they shoot up to about 35 to 40,000 feet in the air, and when they get up there, they explode and throw shrapnel out. They'd get close enough where they'd sink the airplanes sometimes, but they never did hit us.

Interviewer: How did you feel about America's role in the war?

Veteran: We didn't have much choice. After we got attacked, we just couldn't let them run over us. They messed up when they ruined the Navy over in Pearl Harbor and they sunk all their ships, and they should have just kept on coming and hit the United States, which they didn't do. They turned back and started hitting them little islands, and taking all those islands over that they occupied. It took them several years to do all that stuff.

Interviewer: How did you feel about the Germans?

Veteran: People say I'm crazy, but I always felt if the Germans would have made friends with every country they conquered instead of making enemies, I think they would have whipped the world. They had a good fighting machine. When they went through Poland, instead of making friends with them, they were still their enemies, and those people didn't care for that. Of course another thing they did wrong was go to Russia in the middle of the winter. They weren't ready for that because they didn't have the equipment or clothes for the climate that they had in Russia. They had what they called the Cold War and we were just a bunch of kids, but we were still in the Marine Corps. Of course, Russia was still supposed to be on our side, but everybody felt that we should have just stayed in there and started fighting Russia right then. I guess if we had, it would have been the best thing that had ever happened. Patton was running over the Germans. He was going to go right into Berlin, and you know how he stopped them? He was tank commander, and they stopped him by not giving him any fuel. He couldn't go any farther, and they let Russia go into Berlin first, and they built that Berlin Wall. As soon as they got there, they more or less went against us.

Interviewer: How did you feel about the Japanese?

Veteran: Well, I didn't like them at the time, but most of those back then are dead now. They died of old age and things like that. And I think using the atomic bomb was the right thing to do, because if they'd a had it, they'd would have used it on us right quick. These younger people think that was a terrible thing to do, but no telling how many Americans would have gotten killed if they'd have tried to land in Japan. It's not like Galveston and a low beach. They've got cliffs and all that stuff you've got to get up before you can do anything.

Interviewer: Do you remember what you were doing when you heard about the atomic bomb?

Veteran: We were back in the states getting ready to go back over, and they just held everybody up. They had a point system where every month you were overseas, you got so many points; if you were in battle, you got so many points. I can't remember exactly how many points you had to have not to go back overseas, but

I think it was like 60 or 65, and I had a hundred and some odd. That's when I met her. We went out on liberty, and I ran into her and some girls she was with.

Interviewer: Where all were you stationed in the war?

Veteran: When we got over there, we stayed on the Espritos Santos Islands in the Hebrides, because we had B-24s, and the only thing that was landing on Guadalcanal wasfighter planes, because we took too much gasoline. We used to carry two or three thousand gallons of gasoline, because we used to fly thirteen or fourteen hours a day when we'd go up. From our base, we had to go to Guadalcanal and then come back to our base, so we had pretty long days while we were up.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about a typical day?

Veteran: We'd leave about 4:30 or 5:00, take off, and we'd just fly to wherever they wanted us to take pictures, and the photographers would start taking the pictures. We had a B-24, which is a bomber, but our bomb bays were two great big fuel tanks and the photographer's equipment. They took all the bomb racks and everything out of those things for us. We had about ten planes I guess. We were the first ones in the Marine Corps or the Navy that had B-24s in our squadron. We didn't know too much about B-24s—that was a learning process, I guess, as we went along. We had one airplane that crashed when it was taking off and one of them got shot up pretty bad, but the rest of them came through alright.

Interviewer: What did you take pictures of?

Veteran: Those islands when they went over them. We'd have quadrants, and you'd go this way and that way, and that was the quadrant. We had to take pictures of that area of the different islands to see what was going on, what the Japanese were doing, whether they were pulling out or coming in with more equipment, and all that stuff. The photographer would develop them, and they'd turn them over to the intelligence agency.

Interviewer: What kind of meals would you have?

Veteran: Meals were terrible. Spam and cheese, Spam and cheese—{Laughter} I can't even look at Spam anymore.

Interviewer: Did you ever eat anything different?

Veteran: Oh, yeah. They'd have dehydrated food like potatoes and eggs, but it was terrible and smelled bad. It's not like it is now. They've improved that in the last 60 years. You'd be going to the mess hall, and you knew what you were going to eat by the smell. It all smelled bad, but the eggs smelled worse than any of them.

Interviewer: Was there anything you preferred over the other things?

Veteran: One time, some of these Merchant Marines came in and those guys had rifles and flags with them, and they traded it to them for food off the ship, and those guys had good food. We had a bunch of corn and turkey one time, and the dad-blamed cook, instead of cooking corn on the cob or something, he just scraped it all off and made succotash, which is corn and beans mixed together. Everybody thought they were going to get corn on the cob and beans, and he'd mixed them together. He said, "That makes more that way." We had about 350 men in our squad. We weren't like a big battalion where you might have three or four thousand men together, so everybody knew everybody. It was like a big family, and you knew half of their family before it was over. They'd read letters back and forth.

Interviewer: Did you receive mail while you were overseas?

Veteran: Oh, yeah. They had V-mail (for victory), and what they'd do is photograph it and make it real small, and that's they way they'd send it overseas.

Interviewer: Who would write to you?

Veteran: Your mother, aunts, brothers, sisters. I didn't fool around with girls. I had more things on my mind.

Interviewer: What would they write about?

Veteran: Just what was going on over here. We went to Sydney, Australia, for our R&R (Rest & Recreation) one time for two weeks and had a good time. Had good food

there. For breakfast you'd get steak and eggs, and we'd fill up on that. You'd get two eggs and a big steak for, in our money, about $1.25.

Interviewer: When you'd write back home, what would you write about?

Veteran: You couldn't write about much of anything, really. Just this and that. You couldn't say where you were or anything like that, because they didn't want the enemy to know where we were if they got our mail. We'd say everything was OK, whether it was or not, because you didn't want anybody worrying about you. There was repetition everyday—just the same thing over and over. When we weren't flying, we were fooling around working on the airplanes. We had a regular ground crew, but everybody had their own airplane assigned to them.

Interviewer: What about sleeping? Did you sleep on the ground or where?

Veteran: No, we had cots. We were in the Air Force and weren't like 'grunts.' Those guys slept wherever they could. We were in the Marine Air Corps, so we had it a lot better than the riflemen did. They're the ones that got all the nasty work. We'd be up at 30,000 feet while they were down there on the ground.

Interviewer: Did you get to shower and shave regularly?

Veteran: Yeah. When we were at our base, they had drilled some wells there, and we had hot water all the time. We had lights—had a big generator, so our camp was all lit up like it was Times Square almost. That was the funny thing. When we were in California, at nighttime there was no lights, and the closer you got to where the war was, the more lights that were on. They'd turn them out when there'd be a warning. In California, cars were going along at night had their headlights taped across except for a little strip. We were in San Diego, which is right on the ocean, and everything that faced the ocean was blacked out. If the Japanese came over, they couldn't see us.

Interviewer: What did you do in your spare time?

Veteran: Sleep, talk. When we came back to the states, we used to get drunk every night. {Laughter}

Interviewer: Did you get much spare time?

Veteran: Yeah, we had quite a bit of time when we weren't doing anything. We were doing something, but nothing like flying.

Interviewer: Do you remember what you were doing when you heard the war had ended?

Veteran: We really weren't doing anything. We were waiting to go back overseas again. We had everything packed and were just waiting for our orders to leave out again, which never occurred, because they dropped the atomic bomb, and they said to hold everything. I had to stay in for four years, because I was a regular and not a reserve. They started letting the reserves out if they had enough points, but I had about four or five months more, but I didn't mind, because I got paid.

Interviewer: How much did you get paid?

Veteran: When I first joined, we got $21 a month, and then they raised it to $50—that's when you're a private. I got flight pay for being on a flight crew, and then we got overseas pay, which is 10% of your base salary, so I made about $300 and some-odd dollars a month. Nowadays, a private makes about $1,000 a month. It wasn't too bad. You didn't have anything to spend money on except having a good time, because you had your clothes and shoes furnished, and you had a place to sleep.

Interviewer: Did you know that Japanese Americans were being interred in camps here?

Veteran: Not really. I remember one particular time on Guadalcanal, they had about 15 or 20 of them they had captured, somebody was supposed to relieve this guy so he could go eat lunch and they didn't come, and he just shot them and went on to lunch. Nowadays, My God, there'd be a big TV crew there watching stuff like that. And there were guys that were killed by the Americans accidentally, just like they do now, but you didn't ever hear about it. Planes would get the wrong coordinates and drop a bomb on the wrong place, and there would be Americans there instead of the enemy, but that was a part of war. We were young and didn't have any sense anyhow. We didn't worry about it. Never thought about getting shot, never thought about anything. Just there in the service?

Interviewer: Did you carry any weapons?

Veteran: I had a .45 pistol and a 1903 rifle. I had a .38 pistol and a Tommy Gun. I should have kept that Tommy Gun. I was crazy to turn it back in, because I could have gotten a lot of money for it back in the states. When you went overseas, they wrote it off as expendable. They didn't expect to ever see it again. Whatever you brought back, you could have kept it. They didn't have any record of it.

Interviewer: Did you ever encounter any enemies?

Veteran: Just a couple of times. We were up in the air, you know, and we were close enough coming back that the fighter planes intercepted them. We only had one plane ever shot, and it was their fault they got shot up. They thought they were gonna fight them fighter planes with a B-24. {Laughter} The pilot was only about 23 years old and the co-pilot was about like that, too—almost like kids. "Let's see what they can do?" They got shot up pretty bad, but got a medal for it.

Interviewer: Was there any weapon that the enemy had that you feared?

Veteran: Oh, yeah. Their worst weapons would kill with you if you got hit with it. The worst thing they had when we were on The Canal—they had some warships standing there, and they were 16 inch guns. Those were battleships and those things were dangerous, because the concussion from those things would kill you. Most guns had to hit you to kill, but if the concussion from one of those guns hit you, you could just feel the air pushing away from you whenever they hit the ground. They had a big cave over there, and everybody would run in there. They had big, wide doors about "this" thick, and they'd pull 'em shut, but those things would shake when they're hit close by. That's really about the only time I got kind of scared was when they started shooting those 16 inch guns.

Interviewer: When you came back to the states, was it hard to slip back into civilian life?

Veteran: Not really. I didn't have any problem. It wasn't like these guys come from Vietnam and Korea. It was a different war altogether than what they had to fight in. First of all, they didn't tell us we could only so far and you had to stop. See, in Korea, they couldn't go past about the 37th Parallel, and that's why MacArthur

got fired and Truman brought him back because he wanted to shove them all the way out to the sea. It [World War II] was a matter of winning the war. It wasn't a political war like Korea and Vietnam were. It was a war that you had to win.

Interviewer: How were you treated when you came back?

Veteran: We were treated real good. I feel sorry for them guys from Vietnam. If you wanted to go to college, you could. They didn't get anything like that. Every state except Texas gave a pension when they got back. If you wanted to buy a farm in Texas, you could buy up to so many acres, and you only had to pay about 2% interest on the loan, and they'd loan you the money to buy. Now Mary was from Pennsylvania, but she signed up for the Waves in Michigan. Both states gave a pension, but Michigan wouldn't give her a pension because she was from Pennsylvania, and Pennsylvania wouldn't give her a pension because she signed up in Michigan, so she was screwed out of getting anything. Of course, I didn't get anything. That's the biggest mistake we made, because neither one of us went to college.

Interviewer: What did you end of doing after you came back?

Veteran: I started working for my dad, who was a ceramic tile contractor. I had worked for a blueprint company before I went overseas, but I wasn't going back over there.

Interviewer: During the war, did your family have to ration anything?

Veteran: I really don't know. They didn't have it too bad. They couldn't get red meat or stuff like that. I guess toilet paper was rationed, but everybody had to do that. Tires, too. If you had a tire that was bald, you just run it right on that inner tube if you had to. You know what an inner tube is, don't you? You don't have tubes in tires now, you know, but you did back then, and that's what held the air. One time, one of the boys in our outfit, his daddy had three meat markets in Cincinnati, and we wanted to have a bar-b-que, so he wrote his daddy to see if he could get any meat. He couldn't send him any meat, but he sent him a box of red chips, which gave us so many pounds of meat, so we went to every dad-blamed store to get meat. That's all you had to have to get meat was a red chip. We had

all kinds of meat. I don't how much meat they allowed them, but not a heck of a lot. Sugar was rationed—they probably got five pounds a month, I guess.

Interviewer: Did you keep in contact with anyone you met while you were in the war?

Veteran: Not when I got back. Our squadron had a big reunion every year, but I never went to any of them. They had a museum in California, they had one in Washington. I worked for myself, and I couldn't afford to take off. A lot of them stayed in the service. They said they couldn't wait to get out, but I got information occasionally on the guys, and some of them were captains or majors, so they'd stayed in the service and got them a commission.

Interviewer: Whenever you volunteered, had you finished high school?

Veteran: Oh, yeah. I had been out of high school a year or so. That's what I meant when I said we should have gone to college after we got out of the service. She had already had a year of nursing school, and she should have gone back and finished that, and I should have gone on to college. I don't think I could have sat in a schoolroom studying. I just wasn't cut out for that after I got back, because we went to school in the service, but that was a different deal. That was like a vacation, because you went to school, and then you came back and went out on liberty. You'd study about different airplane engines and stuff like that.

Interviewer: Are there any more experiences you want to share?

Veteran: Not really. That's about what we did day in and day out.

Interviewer: I need for you to sign this release form, and they'll send you a complimentary transcript. Thank you for letting me do this interview with you. You've been very helpful.

{END OF INTERVIEW}