

Veteran: **BARKER, W. R.**
Service Branch: **U.S. ARMY**
Interviewer: Amador, Yacel
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Transcriptionist: Terry Moore
Highlights of Service: **World War II; Served on Peleliu, Leyte, and with occupation Forces in Japan**

Interviewer: Today is April 25, 2001, and we are talking to Mr. W. R. Barker. He is a veteran from World War II.

Veteran: This all took place about 1943, and it was the latter part of '43, and all us fellas in high school were anxious to be 18 so we could go into the service. You had to be 18 years old back then—some of them at 17 got in. We were sworn into the U.S. Army in Phoenix, Arizona.

Interviewer: Were you drafted?

Veteran: Yeah, we were drafted. As soon as you became 18, you were part of the draft. After we were sworn in, we left Phoenix and went to San Pedro, California, where we were inducted and received all our equipment—clothes, big shoes, and all that stuff. And then we went from San Pedro up to Santa Maria—they had a camp called Camp Cook where we took our basic training, which was about six weeks. We hiked and did all kind of things. We were buried under tanks—they ran over us in the sand and covered us up, and they'd have to dig us out. That was a scary experience. After we finished our basic training at Camp Cook we went to a place called San Louis Abispo for our amphibious training, and we trained in these landing crafts. They had these big ropes/ladders on walls that we practiced climbing on, because we had to climb on the ships to get on them, and so we practiced on them. And we had some maneuvers on the beaches and fought with each other. After finishing that training we went on up to Camp Beal, and it was up a little north of Frisco, I believe, and took some more training up there. But before we did that in our amphibious training down at San Louis Abispo, we boarded ships, went out on the boat, climbed up the side—that's

where a fellow fell off and got hurt real bad, and he fell off in one of those boats trying to climb it. We had to have all our equipment and everything on us—big, full field pack and rifles. And we went down by a ship close to San Diego, and we crawled off the ship onto these landing craft boats, and we went in and landed on a beach in California. The water was really rough when we went through that, and there was several guys that got hurt. But anyway, we went on by truck up to Camp Beal—a convoy—and I was real fortunate, I was driving the company commander. I was a jeep driver. So we went all the way up to Camp Beal and got ready to go overseas. We didn't know at the time we were getting ready to go overseas, but we later found out. After having some training there we went to Seattle, Washington—they called it Fort Lewis up there—and we boarded the ships and went to Hawaii. When we got to Hawaii, we were supposed to go into jungle training. They were training us for everything. We were supposed to be able to build bridges, we were supposed to be able to clear mine fields, whatever they asked us to do, and so we had a lot of different training. We went through jungle training in Hawaii, and we had night problems—we'd have to hold hands so they wouldn't get loose, and kept getting lost. While we were having jungle training, Bob Hope and his bunch came over. A lot of this I don't remember, but anyway we had a good time when Bob Hope came over. He really entertained everybody, and some of the guys got up on the stage and danced with some of the girls—movie actresses and what have you. We went on from jungle training and boarded a ship, and they said we were going to be forming a task force for an invasion, but we didn't know where we were going or what was going to happen. We stayed on that ship 45 days, and they kept saying they were forming a task force. You could look out over the ocean, and as far as you could see was ships. We knew it was going to be something big. So we went on, and we came to this group of islands called the Palau group, and there was a little island at one end called Angaur (sic?), and the big island was at the other end and there was a couple of little islands between them. All the ships and everything went up there close to this big island and they turned loose with everything they had. And they were shelling that thing, and airplanes were coming in from the aircraft carriers, and they were bombing it. It was supposed to have been a big Japanese base for a submarine base, and they had airplanes and what have you. And there was a lot

of fighting that went on overnight for them getting ready for the invasion, but none of the men went in yet. We stayed aboard ship. After up to two days of bombarding this big island—Battletop, we called it—we went down to the island on the far end and went on that island, and we didn't know it at the time, but the Japanese were all trying to get over to the big island to try to reinforce them. They thought sure that was where they were going to go in. But they didn't go in there at all. They went into the last two islands. Anguar was the furthest down, and the next one up was Pelilu. All the time we were aboard ship, we were listening to Tokyo Rose telling us they were so happy to have us come in to Pelilu. And she'd play this pretty music that we all liked—Glenn Miller and Tommy Dorsey. Back in those days, that was really the best records to listen to. She'd always say there'd be a welcoming committee for you—a party'd be waiting for you when you'd go ashore, you know. And she'd tell the Australian boys (you know, they had Australians fighting from Australia), and she'd tell them that they were doing all the fighting. The Japanese and Americans were back over there in Australia entertaining their wives, and all this stuff. That's the kind of stuff she'd tell them, you know. We went on Anguar, and there was very little fighting. It was real easy to take the island, because most of the Japanese had left. We stayed there three days, and then we went back aboard ship. The day after we hit Angaur, the Marines went in on Pelilu, and the Marines really took a beating. On one side of the island, the Marines lost over 500 men in the first wave. There was over 500 killed. But on the other side of the island, the Marines went in, and right after they got ashore there was an airstrip just a little ways inshore, and they were going to run across that airstrip and take cover at the bottom of what they later called Bloody nose Ridge and the Five Sisters. They had six mountains up there, and Bloody nose Ridge was the biggest. But they didn't know that it had taken the Japanese about twenty years to fortify that mountain, and they had caves all over it, and railroad tracks that ran out, and these big doors opened when they ran out on the tracks, and they would fire and go back in the mountain. When the Marines started across this airstrip from the beach, the Japanese let them get out in the middle of that airstrip and they opened up from that mountain, and they had Marines laying all over the place. It was just terrible the Marines that got killed on Pelilu. But finally the Marines got across,

and they took cover at the bottom of that mountain, and they were right in line of fire of the Japanese. I don't know how many Marines got killed on Pelilu, but I know it was an awful lot. We were out there aboard ship hearing about it and waiting for them to tell us to go in, but the orders came down for our little old outfit of combat engineers to go with a regiment of infantry and go to another island. And so we went to what they called the Ulithi Atoll—twenty-five little islands that kind of made a circle or horseshoe shape—and it was an ideal place for the Navy to bring their damaged ships to be repaired. So we got over there, and there was a chief native on each one of these little islands. And so we had to pick out the biggest island and try to build an airstrip. When we went ashore, they told the chief native that they were going to have to move over to another island, and the bad part about it is when we invaded the island we thought the Japanese were there—that's what they had told us. And were just shooting and what have you. We killed one of the chief's daughters, and that was a serious thing. We were trying to be friendly with them people, and we thought they were Japanese to start with. So they were already real mad at us. The carpenters in the outfit built a real nice casket for this girl—the daughter of the chief—and they had never buried their dead in a casket. They wrapped them in those palm leaves, you know, and they sewed the leaves together and all this stuff. So when we fixed that nice casket up for the chief's daughter, we began to become friends and we were able to persuade the chief and his bunch to go over to the other islands while we worked on this island. We had to take the coconut trees and smooth them out, and then take them out to the edge of the island, which was coral rock. And we took this demolition blasting stuff, and blowed holes in the coral rock, and we took a pile driver and we added on to the island to make it long enough for an airplane—a little fighter to land. So, we just about had it complete. We had it all smoothed out, and we were fixing to lay the wire matting that they'd lay on top of it. And the Seabees came in, and low and behold they thought we were Japanese, and they came in to fight us. And we had to let them know real quick that we were on their side, and we had been there, and we asked them what they were coming in there for, and they said, "We came to build an airstrip." Well, we just about had it finished. But they just shipped us from one place to another. We were attached to everybody. We were attached to the 81st Division, a wildcat

infantry, and we were attached to the 4th Army, and the 8th Army, and I don't know how many different armies we were attached to, because we were just 750 men, and everybody was wanting combat engineers. So we went back aboard ship, and they sent us back to Pelilu, and when we getting ready to leave they landed the first airplane on our airstrip, and the Seabees got a presidential citation for the airstrip that we built. And we laughed about that—it's in a history book, and if I ever found it, I'd show it to you. Then we went back to Pelilu to relieve the Marines. They had been fighting and fighting up there on the ridges, and they were having a terrible time trying to convince the Japanese that there wasn't any use in fighting—that they needed to surrender. They had an interpreter, and he was on this public address system. They had these big speakers set up all up there in the mountains, and he'd talk to them day and night begging them to come out and surrender. Some of them would come out. They had to come out completely nude, because if they had a belt or anything on them, they usually had something that would blow up (a hand grenade or something), that would blow up about the time you got up close to them, so you couldn't trust them to have anything on when they came out of those caves.

Interviewer: What happened when they came out of the caves?

Veteran: When we went up to relieve the Marines, they had to break us in because some of the guys hadn't been on the front lines. But they told us not to take any prisoners, because the Marines wanted to kill everybody because they'd had so many of their buddies killed, you know. They said that the best weapon that you had was the flamethrower, because it would go around a corner and then go in the holes and go in the caves when you couldn't shoot a gun and do any good. So they had this big armored bulldozer, and it would go down there—it was more like a tank—it would go down in a valley that they had there. And they'd get down in the bottom of it—and all the Japanese had was rifles—and they were just trying to get them all to surrender, and the ones that were left wouldn't do it. And they'd turn this flamethrower loose. And this tank or bulldozer—whichever it was—it had a tremendous flame. It would heat up that whole valley when they shot that flame, and it would go in all these holes and everything. I know one day we were up there before they brought that tank in there, these guys would sneak

down and try to get to the mouth of a cave without the Japanese seeing them, with a flamethrower, and he'd get right at the mouth and shoot that flame in there from a flamethrower on his back. And this one Marine would go down there close to the cave, and he stood up and was going to turn on that flamethrower, and this Japanese came running out with a bayonet in his hand, and he ran at that Marine, and that Marine turned that flamethrower on, and that Japanese never did stop. When he turned the flamethrower off, that Japanese was burning right in front of him. Isn't that horrible? Anyway, they begged those Japanese to surrender, and they wouldn't do it. They had kind of a belief that if they died for their emperor, it was an honorable thing to do. And this Japanese general that they had there, he committed hara-kiri—killed himself. Even when I came back from the war, I read in the papers that there was Japanese still holding out on Pelilu. They had it so fortified, and we put tear gas and everything in the world they could think of to get those Japanese out of those caves. And there at the latter part (we stayed up there 39 days after the Marines left), if you didn't carry a canteen of water on you, the Japanese would leave you alone—you didn't have to worry about getting shot or anything. They were in such bad need of water, and they had this little spring out in the middle of that valley down there, and at night they'd try to sneak out and get a drink of water. They'd send up this flare just about the time they'd get out to that water, and when they'd get a taste of that water, they didn't want to leave, you know. And then they'd get killed trying to get back to the cave. The Japanese didn't have a chance at all, but they wouldn't give up on Pelilu. When they finally took us down to the beach, because we all got sick—we got this diarrhea—dysentery, couldn't eat anything because we were just sick as a dog all the time. So they took us down and put us on the beach, and one night after we got down there it was about as bad as being up there on the front lines. They had an ammunition dump that exploded and caught on fire, and all these bombs and white phosphorus shells and all kind of stuff was going up in the air. And they had these swamps they didn't want everybody to get into, but these quartermasters that were in charge of that ammunition dump, they were running through that swamp like there wasn't nothing to it, you know. I remember getting underneath a weapons carrier—a little truck—and I could see these shells sitting out there—some of them bombs and different things—and I didn't know

whether they were going to explode or not. And it tore up our area pretty bad. Most of us were pretty sick anyway, we were about ready to die, and a lot of us didn't think we were ever going to come back to the States. But we went from Pelilu to New Caledonia for a rest. When they found out we were combat engineers, we were building stuff nearly all the time we were in Caledonia for those people down there. We left there and went to the Philippines. But another thing that happened on Pelilu—we were so small that they just about forgot about us, and we weren't getting anything to eat. So we had built a ramp out into the water on this coral rock for the trucks to go back out there to the ship. When they let the door down on the ship, the trucks could back in there and load up with supplies, and they took it over to the Marine airbase, and we weren't getting anything to eat, and they were eating good. So we decided if we could get some whiskey from the officers—they got a ration of whiskey about every two or three months—if we could get some of that we could catch a ride with these truck drivers and bribe them into giving us some of those supplies. The officers thought that was a good idea, because they knew what shape we were in—we were all sick. So we'd go down there at night with the whiskey and catch a ride with the truck drivers, and we'd ask them if they'd take a little whiskey would they back into our outfit to give us something to eat. They said, "You can just empty the whole truck—let me have that whiskey." And I went to a reunion out in California after we got back, and the company commander before he died—Larry Gates—he was an actor on *Guiding Light*—but he told our wives, "You don't know what talent your husbands had—they were the biggest thieves in the Pacific Ocean. It's a good thing they were, because we wouldn't have eaten if they hadn't been." Then we left Pelilu, and they took us to a rest place in New Caledonia, and we built some stuff there. They loaded us aboard ships again, and we didn't know where we were going or what they were going to do with us. But we went to the Philippines, and we were going to prepare for Okinawa, but they said due to us being sick and everything, maybe we wouldn't have to go. So we stayed in the Philippines. One amazing thing that happened, my brother was in the Coast Artillery in New York, and when the Germans surrendered, they sent all those guys that were still in the service over for replacements in the Pacific, and he was sent to Luzon in the Philippines. Luzon was a different island than I

was on—I was on Leyte and he landed on Luzon. When he got in there, he asked them where my APO was, and was told I was on Leyte. So they said, ‘You happen to be going to an antiaircraft outfit on Leyte.’ So he came over there, and I hadn’t heard from him in four years, except a letter once in awhile. But he called me on the telephone—I never got a phone call. Anyway, I went up there to the command post and answered the phone, and it was him. I asked him where he was, and he said, “I’m down here at this Triple A antiaircraft outfit,” and I said, “I’ll be right down.” So I jumped in my jeep and took out down there where he was out, and we really had a good reunion. It wasn’t very long after that that the Japanese surrendered, and when they did we talked to the company commander, and they transferred him over in my outfit and put him in the same tent with me. That just shows you what a small world this is. Then we thought we were all going to get to come home since the Japs had surrendered, and they said we were going to go to Japan as occupational troops, and we’d all been taking salt tablets for the heat {END OF SIDE A}—

{START OF SIDE B} *Much of the beginning of Side B was a recap of Side A.*

We left Peleliu and they said that we were gonna go in training for Okinawa. We went to what they called New Caledonia. We were supposed to go to New Zealand, but we went down to New Caledonia, because the whole outfit got dysentery. Man, one of the guys was so sick they had to ship him out, and we never did see him again. I don’t know whether he died or what, but he just got down to skin and bones. And the medics and what have you couldn’t stop it. We had some kind of bug we couldn’t get rid of. But I never did have real bad as some of the others did, and I was one of the lucky ones. So we went down to New Caledonia for a rest, and we stayed there for not too long a time until all the men got halfway healthy again, you know. And so when we finally got there they shipped us to the Philippines. Then they were planning the invasion of Japan, and we were all thinking we were going to invade Japan. One night we were sitting on the beach watching a movie—you know, they had everything blacked out, but once in awhile we’d get in this big old tent, and everybody’d get to see a movie. And we were all sitting there watching that movie and all of a sudden

somebody hollered, “The Japs have surrendered! The war’s over!” And nobody seemed to believe him, you know, and so they just kept on watching the movie. And so he kept on a-hollerin’ it, and sure enough he finally got his message over to us, and we all come out of the movie, and was hollerin’ and yellin’, and the ships began to turn on their lights. And they had what they called a ration of beer every so often, so they just started giving everybody cases of beer. They were really having a good time. So we celebrated, and instead of invading Japan, we thought we were all gonna get to go home, but we didn’t. They got us all ready, and we went to Japan as occupational troops. So they sent us in on the northern tip of Panshoo (sic)—you know, **Yokohama** and Tokyo and all of that down at one end. And this was what they called a place called Aomori Panshoo(sic), and it’s a little place up on the northern tip where you go through some straits there, kind of like coming into the Houston Ship Channel. You had to go through there, and you could see land on either side. And we came down through those straits at night, and the next morning we were down in the harbor of Aomori, and there was a big piling out in the middle of the harbor. I guess about thirty or forty feet in diameter where the some of the ships couldn’t get up to the docks, and a big sign right in the middle of it says “Kilroy’s Been Here.” But we got off the boat in Japan, and it was just amazing how accurate our bombardiers were when they dropped the bombs, because the city was just bombed within a foot of the ground—just concrete left, that’s about all. And you’d be going down through the town there and there wouldn’t be anything—everything was bombed. And you’d come to one of these Japanese shrines where they worshipped, and there would be a big building there, and there’d just a few windows broken in it. How they kept from bombing them, I don’t know, but they saved nearly all the things that they worshipped. You know, the big Buddhas and stuff, and it was amazing how the bombardiers did that, but they musta had some feeling for them. But it was real surprising. We were up in the peasant country—Aomori. Tokyo and Yokohama was more modern, you know. But another thing is you’d see a Japanese man coming down the road and his wife would be following him, and she’d have everything in the world on her back, and he wouldn’t be carrying anything. You know, women did everything. When we first went in there, the women would have several layers of clothes on, you know. It was a cold country.

And they'd have their slacks tied with several knots at their ankles. They were so scared of us, they thought we were going to rape them and everything. We tried to be friends with them. We'd stop and raise the hood on a jeep or a truck or something, and all these little Japanese kids would come and look at that motor. They'd never seen anything like it. It was pretty pitiful. And we didn't know it was going to get that cold. All we had was that old G.I. blanket when we came in there as occupation troops, and the first night they said, "We're gonna take over that Japanese warehouse down here, and we're gonna all stay in that." So when I got the company commander to his quarters (they had a different place they were staying), I went back to that warehouse, and I opened the door to go in that warehouse and I could hear those guys teeth chattering, it was so cold. That G.I. blanket just wasn't enough, and everybody was about to freeze. Later on we built Quonset huts, and they finally got some winter equipment in there. And we had these big potbelly stoves and run diesel oil to them. Man, they got hot, and we'd warm those things up, and it was really nice. But it got to be three foot of snow on the ground there, and we'd all been taking salt tablets to stand the heat in the Philippines and everywhere, and so it took us a little time to get used to all that. But we'd go outside and take our mess gear and just dip it in that snow and go back inside, and add evaporated cream to it, and it made the best ice cream. We'd have ice cream parties. One night we were sitting on the bed, and all of a sudden everything went to shaking—they'd had an earthquake. And now that's a funny feeling. I had never been in one before, and I haven't been in once since, but that earthquake was really something. Nowhere to run. You'd just sit there and watch everything rock. But anyway, we stayed in Japan and they got the surrender and everything over—I believe it was in September when they surrendered. And we stayed there until about January or February, and they started shipping different ones out. They had a point system. *(Veteran begins recounting the time his brother surprised him in the Philippines at this point.)*
{RECORDING STOPS HERE—NO FURTHER CONVERSATION ON THIS TAPE}

{ BEGINNING OF TAPE #2 }

Veteran: *(Begins by recounting arrival in Aomori Panshoo, the lack of cold-weather supplies, the building of Quonset huts, and "Kilroy's Been Here" sign on the large pier.)* We finally got some supplies in and some heavier equipment and clothes to keep us warm, but there for about a week we nearly froze. We even played football out in the snow. But the Japanese were scared to death of us. We didn't like any of them, but we tried to make friends with them. But it came time to get discharged, so they shipped them out by the point system. I had been over there in the war all the time and my brother had been in Coney Island, and some of these guys, they resented him, but he'd been in the service so long, he had more points, and he could get out before we could. And so he got to go home before we did. Some of them were mad—I was kinda mad myself. But it all worked out good, and we rode a train all the way down through Japan, and we got down to Yokohama, or somewhere down there. They had a place of debarkation, and we got on a ship with five thousand men on it, and I believe they had three hundred sailors. We came back across that ocean, and came in at San Francisco Bay under the Golden Gate Bridge, and they had bands and boats come out, and girls a-dancing and everything alongside the ship welcoming us home, you know. And then when we unloaded from the boat, they took us to a little place called Pittsburgh, California, across the bay from San Francisco, and they had a bunch of these German prisoners of war, and they entertained us. They fed us steaks and milk—we hadn't had any milk since we'd been over there. A glass of milk was really something. And so they had these big pitchers of milk, and we ate steak and had everything—big meal. I guess after the next couple of days, we shipped out and went back down to San Pedro where we first came in. We were given all our discharge papers after a few days there, and \$300 mustering out pay, and we all went home. But there was a few that signed up to stay in, and some got in the reserves, but I came on back and moved back to Texas—in Baytown. That's where my brother was, and so I came back down here. And that's about it.

{ END OF INTERVIEW }