

Veteran: CATE, Brinton
Service Branch: MARINES
Interviewer: Campbell, Justin L.
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Transcriptionist: Terry Moore
Highlights of Service: **World War II; Corporal—Military Police; On Iwo Jima when atomic bomb dropped; Saw aftermath at Nagasaki; OCC/duty, Japan**

Interviewer: {Tape starts in mid-sentence} ...do I have your permission to do that?

Veteran: Yes.

Interviewer: This is Justin L. Campbell, and I'm doing a Lee College oral history report for U.S. History 1302 for Dr. Edwards. Today, we are sitting with Brinton Cate. When were you born and where?

Veteran: July 16, 1924; Jackson, Michigan.

Interviewer: Where did you grow up?

Veteran: In Jackson, Michigan.

Interviewer: How many years did you stay there?

Veteran: Eighteen.

Interviewer: Is that where you joined from?

Veteran: Yes.

Interviewer: What made you decide to join the military?

Veteran: When the war started on December 7th, I was at my buddy's house, and his dad was a retired Navy man, so we were going to join the Navy. We went down to the recruiter and were gonna sign up. We filled out the papers, and the next day his dad went down there and said, "If you ever see them in here, throw 'em out!" {Laughter} So, I decided I'd join the Marines.

Interviewer: How old were you when you joined?

Veteran: 18.

Interviewer: What year was it when you joined?

Veteran: January 1942.

Interviewer: What was your family's reaction—your parents?

Veteran: At the time, what else could they do?

Interviewer: Why did you choose the Marines?

Veteran: Because I had buddies that were in the Marines, and I knew that was my next choice.

Interviewer: Did they ship you out right away? Was that the process?

Veteran: No, I think it was a month before they really signed us up, and then we went to Detroit. From there we went to California?

Interviewer: And you did all your training in California?

Veteran: All the training was at Camp Pendleton in San Diego.

Interviewer: What was that like?

Veteran: Oh, it was different than what I was used to, and it was a stiff training—lots of discipline. Had to run a lot, and then spend six weeks at the rifle range, and boat training.

Interviewer: What was your first duty station?

Veteran: Camp Pendleton was where our division headquarters was, so we trained there, too. I started out with a 37mm gun crew—one of those anti-tank outfits—and they split that up. I went to division headquarters, and then they put me in an M.P. company. I trained in all of that until I got to Hawaii.

Interviewer: You didn't think about the war? You weren't scared or nothing at the time?

Veteran: Not really, because I was just 18 years old. The woman that recruited me into the Marines, her son was in Guadalcanal, and he was shot up pretty bad when he came back, so that scared me a little bit. It was different, I'll tell you.

Interviewer: What was your pay like?

Veteran: Pay wasn't too hot. I think it was \$20 a month or something like that. It wasn't very much.

Interviewer: Where were you when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor?

Veteran: I was on my way to my buddy's house, and they announced it on the radio that they had attacked us on December 7th. We talked to his dad, the retired Navy man, all day long, and my buddy and I was gonna join right up the next day. He said, "No, you don't want the Navy." He knew where we were going, and he went down there a couple of days later and told them, "If you ever see these guys in here again, throw 'em out!" I guess it was the next week that my buddy joined the Air Force, and I joined the Marines.

Interviewer: Do ya'll still keep in touch?

Veteran: No, he got killed over in Germany. He went down over the English Channel is what I heard.

Interviewer: How long was it before they shipped you out?

Veteran: We were in California one year, and then we went to Hawaii.

Interviewer: Did you get to see the damage in Pearl Harbor? Was it real bad?

Veteran: Oh, yeah. A lot of the damage had been cleaned up by the time I got there, which was in 43 to 44, but some of the damage was still there.

Interviewer: How long did you stay in Hawaii?

Veteran: Pretty near two years. I got to stay behind on two operations, when they went to the Marshall Islands and then to Saipan, Tinian. I stayed in Hawaii, and they sent

me downtown to pull M.P. duty. The last operation was to Iwo Jima, and they did send me out there.

Interviewer: And that was right after they dropped the bomb?

Veteran: No, that was before they dropped the bomb on Japan. Right after we went to Iwo Jima is when they dropped the bomb.

Interviewer: Where were you when the bomb was dropped?

Veteran: I was probably on Iwo Jima.

Interviewer: Could you hear anything?

Veteran: Oh, no.

Interviewer: Did ya'll know it was coming?

Veteran: No, we had no indication.

Interviewer: How long after it hit did they tell you?

Veteran: Japan was the next stop after Iwo Jima, but we never would have taken Japan. They dropped the bomb after Iwo Jima, and there was 27 of us went to Japan. I went to Japan to occupy it, and was one of the first troops in Japan. Slept on the docks there coming in. There wasn't a soul around that town when we got there, and all of a sudden they started coming out of the hills.

Interviewer: What was their reaction to ya'll?

Veteran: They didn't know what was going on, and that's why they were back in the hills. They were afraid we were gonna attack them.

Interviewer: And there was only 27 of ya'll?

Veteran: Yeah, and we were the first ones after they signed all the agreements with the generals and all that. There in Japan, there was only one way into Sasebo. The boats lined up for miles going into it, and there were battleships in all these little inlets. I stayed there for three or four months, I think it was.

Interviewer: After the people found out about the bomb, how did the people react to ya'll?

Veteran: Actually there was so much bombed out around there, there wasn't much left really. We didn't hardly do anything but police work. It was surprising, though, how they started coming out of those hills. There was wagons being pulled by an old gal with an old man sitting on top with all their belongings. They had us billeted in an old courthouse right there on this little inlet on the bay, and we just had to keep the law and order.

Interviewer: Did ya'll know what the bomb was and what it did?

Veteran: Oh, yeah, because we went up to that Nagasaki where it hit. You talk about devastation—woo! You could just see a shadow where the people had been burned right into the pavement.

Interviewer: How far away was this from where it had actually hit?

Veteran: I couldn't say exactly, but it wasn't too far away.

Interviewer: They had ya'll that close after the bomb had hit?

Veteran: Maybe a month after that. The day my boat went back to New York, we went right into Japan as occupation forces. We all had enough time to go home. You know, we'd been overseas for two years, but they sent 27 of us over there. Went in there with live ammunition, too, but they didn't pull anything on us. I was surprised there wasn't a darned soul around there. All the streets were torn up. When they started to rebuild, all the women were doing the work with the men standing around watching them. Road work and everything. I'd never seen anything like that. It was a little backwards.

Interviewer: How long did you stay in?

Veteran: I was in three years almost to the day.

Interviewer: You left Japan and went back to Hawaii?

Veteran: They weren't gonna send us home, and our master sergeant, who was from Detroit, said he wasn't going to send us home until he had to. But this gunny we had said, "Oh, yeah?" And so he wrote his congressman, and boy, it wasn't but

about a week after that, and we had a boat out there. We all had time enough to go home when the division did earlier, but I guess it was because we were M.P.s that we had to go in with the occupation forces.

Interviewer: You didn't want to stay in any longer?

Veteran: Not really.

Interviewer: What was your rank when you got out?

Veteran: Corporal. Should have been sergeant.

Interviewer: I met a couple of Marine corporals, and they were pretty rough.

Veteran: I was acting-sergeant for a long time. I don't know why I didn't get the rating, because I was a squad leader.

Interviewer: Did you receive any awards?

Veteran: Not really—just for the rifle range. Nothing special.

Interviewer: Do you have anything you would like to add?

Veteran: Only that it was quite an experience. I lost a lot of buddies.

Interviewer: Were you actually in any combat?

Veteran: When I was on Iwo Jima, we landed right below Surabachi where they raised that flag, and we pretty much stayed right in that area. We took prisoners—what little there were.

Interviewer: You mean right where they raised that flag?

Veteran: Well, right below it on that airstrip. One of them bombers, I think, came back from Japan and landed on Iwo—or crashed on it—and hit the side of that mountain. I lost one of my best buddies up there. He played football and joined up after we did. He was in the infantry. Just about everybody got wounded but me. I guess I got lucky. We did have a narrow miss, though. We were eating one night in this shell hole, and we walked out and they dropped mortars in that

damn thing. That's about the worst experience for me was at Iwo Jima, but I lucked out because I didn't have to go to Saipan and the Marshall Islands.

Interviewer: Did the Japanese seem to have a pretty good defense over there?

Veteran: Oh, yeah—they pillboxes. That was one of our duties over in Japan until things kind of settled down over there. They had a pillbox in front of this courthouse, and this gunner there wanted us to pretty it up. Those walls were three foot thick. They busted up bulldozers and all kinds of stuff trying to dig those things up. Finally they told them to forget. They were buried very deep.

Interviewer: Would you do it all again if you had it to over?

Veteran: I think I would.

Interviewer: You're proud of what you did?

Veteran: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: No regrets?

Veteran: Not really. No regrets whatsoever.

Interviewer: This concludes my interview with Mr. Cate. Thank you very much, sir.

{TAPE STOPPED—END OF INTERVIEW}