

VETERAN: *WILLIAM W. HERNDON*
HIGHEST RANK/GRADE: *CORPORAL*
INTERVIEWED BY: *MIGUEL CARLOS*

William Herndon told me things in this interview that I never realized about fighting in a war. I learned of the dangers and some of the sufferings that soldiers from our country were dealing with. It also made me see how hard it is to live through the conditions which he and other soldiers had to exist. I know every single man that goes into the Army and fights in a war is full of pride and bravery. When Mr. Herndon was telling me these stories, he was very calm. I was expecting a mean man in the interview, and I just got the opposite. I thought he was going to answer the questions in a harsh manner, but I wasn't even close. I know that you don't have to be mean to go to war—you just need the courage to stand up for what you believe in.

Q: Place of enlistment?

A: Houston, Texas, September 1, 1939.

Q: Previous occupation? How useful was it to you in the service, if at all?

A: I dropped out of high school to join the Army; didn't have a job.

Q: How and why did you join the service?

A: I joined because I wanted to make something out of myself.

Q: At the time, did you feel the 1940 draft was necessary and fair?

A: Even though I wasn't involved, I thought it was necessary and fair.

Q: Describe the circumstances in which you first heard of the attack on Pearl Harbor.

A: It was a Sunday morning, and I was outside waiting for the paper boy. I suddenly heard bombs, and we all thought that a plane had crashed, but they soon found out that it was an attack.

Q: Where did you train as a recruit?

A: I trained in Schofield in Hawaii, and fought at Guadalcanal.

Q: In what specialties were you trained?

A: I was a gunner.

Q: What further training, if any, did you receive overseas?

A: All we did was practice shooting.

Q: At what posts were you stationed during your stateside service?

A: I was stationed in Fort Macdale out in the Harbor by San Francisco.

Q: Why did you fight?

A: I fought because I had to (jokingly).

Q: What was your opinion of the weapons you saw or used in the service?

A: I thought they were alright. We had the Springfield rifle onto which we welded this clip, and it was able to shoot twenty-one times before you had to load again.

Q: Were they reliable?

A: They were very reliable.

U. S. ARMY

Q: What were your opinions of the equipment, clothing, and rations you were issued?

A: They weren't the best in the world, but they were suitable.

Q: What did you think of the quality of leadership while you were in the service?

A: The leadership was good.

Q: Who were the "real" leaders — officers, noncoms, or enlisted men?

A: The sergeants were the ones that ran the show.

Q: What did you think of the discipline at the time?

A: It was very strict.

Q: What forms of off-duty recreation were common?

A: We had bowling, baseball, boxing, and football. My favorite was boxing.

Q: Was drinking a problem in your unit?

A: No, it wasn't.

Q: Was there much gambling? If so, what types?

A: The only gambling we had was with cards.

Q: At what point in your movement overseas did you learn your real destination?

A: They told us that we were going to Australia. We were told our real destination on New Caledonia.

Q: What information, if any, did the Army give you about the countries in which you served?

A: They didn't give us any.

Q: Did you know or observe any newspaper, magazine or radio coverage of the war and of your unit?

A: I did hear some radio correspondents, but I don't know who they were.

Q: Did you take part in any combat action?

A: No, I was discharged because I had malaria fever.

Q: How was the morale of your unit?

A: I thought it was pretty good.

Q: If you were even wounded in action, please recount the circumstances.

A: My malaria fever caused me to see little combat.

Q: Did you ever participate in cooperative operations with a sister service?

A: No, I didn't.

Q: Describe a "typical" day when your unit was committed to the front lines.

A: We would clean our weapons and wash our clothes in the river.

Q: How did you and your comrades regard enemy troops (Germans, Italians, Japanese) as fighters?

A: The Japanese were sneaky. They would tie themselves on trees and would only kill the sergeants. They were also trained to cut tendons on both of the wrists and at the back of the ankles.

Q: How effective were their weapons?

A: They were very effective; they could kill (laughing).

Q: What did you think about the enemy as people?

A: I thought they were on dope.

- Q: Were you ever a prisoner of war?
A: No, thank God, I never was.
- Q: Did you capture any enemy prisoners?
A: No, our unit never did.
- Q: What were your reactions and those of your unit to VE Day?
A: I was glad to see it over with.
- Q: How was the morale and discipline of your unit after the end of hostilities?
A: There were only four men left in the unit.
- Q: What awards and decorations did you receive?
A: I got some medals, but it's been so long I don't remember what they were for.
- Q: Please provide your date and place of discharge.
A: August 28, 1943, at Old Riley General Hospital in Springfield, Missouri.
- Q: What did you do after you were discharged?
A: I worked for Humble Oil and Refining Company in Baytown.
- Q: What does the G.I. Bill mean to you?
A: I was the first person in East Harris County to get a G.I. loan.
- Q: With whom do you feel most comfortable discussing your wartime experiences?
A: I haven't really discussed the war a lot.
- Q: World War II was a significant national experience. What, if anything, did it teach you about America and Americans?
A: It seemed like at that time everyone wanted to pull together.
- Q: What were your expectations at the end of the war as to prospects for world stability?
A: I was hoping there wouldn't be no more wars.
- Q: What were your expectations at the end of the war as to America's place and influence in the world?
A: I think that we were seen as leaders and we were the ones that could help other countries to become like us.