YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU Veterans Project

World War II Experience

O. H. 114

JOSEPH TRIMACCO

Interviewed

by

Jeffrey Scott Suchanek

on

October 18, 1980

JOSEPH TRIMACCO

Joseph Trimacco was born on March 18, 1917, in Susquehanna, Pennsylvania, the son of Gabriel and Octavia Trimacco. Joseph Trimacco spent his childhood in Struthers, Ohio, where his family had moved when he was very young. He also attended Highland Avenue and Struthers High Schools. Joseph was forced to terminate his education due to the pressing need for work during the Depression of the 1930's. Joseph Trimacco enlisted in the United States Army in 1940 and was assigned to Company H, 145th Infantry Regiment, 37th Division.

Due to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Joseph Trimacco's military career was extended and he consequently saw action in the New Georgia, Bouganville, and Philippine Campaigns against the Japanese, serving as a mortar man and a light machine gunner. After spending 42 months overseas in the service of his country he returned to the United States in October of 1945. In 1946 he married his wife Daisy.

Upon returning to the United States, Joseph immediately went back to work at Youngstown Sheet and Tube where he remained gainfully employed for 42 years until the plant closed down. A member of St. Nicholas Church, Joseph Trimacco is also an active member of the 37th Division Veterans Association and the Italian-American War Veterans. He also belongs to the Steel Valley Harmonica Club and the

1418 Retiree Club. He received all of the medals, awards, and presentations due him for his participation in the Southwest Pacific during World War II including a Bronze Star and the Purple Heart. His hobbies and interests include playing the harmonica, music, and dancing.

Jeffrey Scott Suchanek
October 20, 1980

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INTERVIEWEE: JOSEPH TRIMACCO

INTERVIEWER: Jeffrey Scott Suchanek

SUBJECT: 37th Division Veteran in World War II

DATE: October 18, 1980

S: This is an interview with Joseph Trimacco for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program's 37th Division Veterans Project by Jeffrey Scott Suchanek on this, the 18th of October, 1980, at 474 Edison Lane in Struthers, Ohio at approximately 10:15 a.m.

Okay Joe, let's start out with a little bit about your background; where you were born and when, where you grew up, who some of your friends were.

T: I was born in Susquehanna, Pennsylvania on March 18, 1917. We came to Struthers when I was about a year old and I've been in Struthers ever since. I don't know what you mean by friends.

S: Well, just who were some of your childhood friends?

T: Well, I had Joey Petrus, who was my next door neighbor and we were close. We used to pal around together. There's many, many of them. Do you want me to name them all?

S: Do you still stay in contact with these?

T: With Joey Petrus I do. The rest of them are moved out or I don't know where they're at, from my school or younger, boyhood days.

S: Where did you used to go play?

T: Play?

S: Yes.

T: We used to play around the streets. We had no toys or bicycles. We used to play on the streets as a young boy.

S: Where did you go to school? Tell us a little about your education.

T: I went to Highland Avenue School in Struthers, that's a grade school. And I went to Struthers High School.

S: What year did you graduate?

T: I didn't graduate. I went until the second year of high school and then I quit during the Depression and went to work. I got a job fixing cars, a mechanic. I was trying to learn to be a mechanic, but after a couple years of that I figured I wasn't making enough money. I quit and went and worked in a steel mill, Youngstown Sheet and Tube. I worked in Sheet and Tube for 42 years until they went down and kicked me out. But I had 42 years in Sheet and Tube.

S: What can you remember about the Depression?

T: What I remember about the Depression? It was a hard times is all I know. I never had no toys, food was scarce, clothes was scarce. That's one of the reasons I quit in the second year of high school because I didn't have enough clothes. Went to get a job.

S: Can you remember what your father did?

T: My father worked in Sheet and Tube also. He worked in the labor construction.

S: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

T: Yes, I had nine brothers and sisters. I had five brothers and four sisters.

S: Did you brothers also go to Sheet and Tube?

T: No, I had two brothers work in Sheet and Tube and one worked in Hynes Steel in Youngstown.

S: Can you remember your parents talking about the Depression at all, about FDR [Franklin Delano Roosevelt] , about the New Deal?

T: No, they weren't very educated. They had come from Italy. They didn't speak good English. They didn't know too much about it.

S: Did they talk about your grandparents at all?

T: My father did because my mother, she was an adopted child and she didn't know too much about her parents. My father did talk about his parents.

S: When did you join the Army? Did you enlist of were you drafted?

T: I enlisted before my time. That wasn't for the draft. I had a high number but I figured it was only a year. I wanted to get it over with so I went down and enlisted before my time. I was laid off at the time and I figured by the time I come back maybe I can get a job again. So, I went down and enlisted before my time.

S: Where did you enlist at?

T: In Struthers. Struthers, Ohio Court House in Struthers. But I was inducted in Cleveland, from Struthers.

S: You had to go up there for your physical?

T: Yes, I went to Cleveland for my physical. That was January 27, 1941. From there we went to Camp Shelby, Mississippi.

S: What was your first impression of Camp Shelby when you stepped off the train? Do you remember that?

T: It looked pretty much like a desert. Not too much around. And we lived in tents. We had no barracks. We lived in tents. It was pretty much like a desert, not too much around there.

S: What kind of impression can you remember that basic training had on you? Do you have any set picture in your mind when you think of training camp? Anything that happened, what was it like?

T: We would take off in the morning and we would go out to the field to train and train for two or three hours. Then come back in for dinner and then go back out in the field again.

S: Was it tough?

T: No, it wasn't too tough, not in Camp Shelby it wasn't. It wasn't tough at all. There'd be a lot of lectures and we would go through the motions with our weapons. By the way, when I first got in we didn't even have enough weapons. We used to use sticks for weapons.

S: There wasn't enough to go around?

T: There wasn't enough to go around, yes. I was put in the 81 millimeter mortar, I was in the heavy weapons company which had heavy machine guns and heavy mortars.

S: How did you get into that? How did you get into the heavy weapons?

T: They put me into that. I didn't ask for this, that's where they put me. See, I went to the 37th Division from start to the end. I didn't go through any basic training. I had my basic training with the 37th Division. I stayed with them for four and a half years. A year term, I was supposed to go for one year, but it turned out to be for four and a half years.

S: What did the initials O. H. I. O. mean to you?

T: Yes, I remember, Over the Hill in October, yes. Is that what you're referring to?

S: Yes.

T: Well, I think it was just talk. It was nothing serious about it. I didn't think nothing of it. I know I wasn't going to go over the hill. But there were some of them, I guess, disgusted, disgruntled and talking about Over the Hill in October, and it spells Ohio. But, I don't think they meant it, I don't think they would do this.

S: You were all just in for a year?

T: Yes, we were supposed to be in for a year, yes, but we were not at war at the time.

S: Right. How were you kept informed about what was happening in Europe? What were your feelings about the War in Europe? Did you think the British could handle it?

T: No, even though we went in for a year we were sure we would spend more than a year in the service. Even our officers used to tell us, "Don't be surprised if you are going to smell salt water in the morning." That meant we were going to be going overseas. They felt that we was going to get in it sooner or later.

S: Did you consider the Japanese a threat at this time?

T: No we didn't because their people were in Washington at the time negotiating peace with our people in Washington. It was a surprise that they did it. To me it was a surprise that they attacked Pearl Harbor.

S: Okay, December 7, 1941. Do you remember what you were doing and where you were at when you heard the news about Pearl Harbor?

T: I believe I was in a theatre when we got news over the loudspeakers that everybody go back to their companies.

S: Did you suspect something was up?

T: Yes, we thought something was wrong but I didn't know exactly what it was until they told us that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor.

S: What did you think about the Japanese at this time, what were your feelings about them? Did you consider them a worthy foe?

T: Well, I thought they were, but I thought America could handle them in time. I thought they were,

S: Did the news of Pearl Harbor shock you? Were you really surprised?

T: Yes, I was surprised. I didn't think the Japanese would attack the United States. I didn't think they would. It was a surprise to me.

S: Now, after the attack on Pearl Harbor, did you feel that the Division would go to Europe?

T: Well, we didn't know exactly where we were going to go, but we did move out of Mississippi. We went to Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania which is a staging area for the European theatre. And we were supposed to go to Europe or Africa. At the time we had this great big boat, this great big French boat, the Normandy that they were repairing for troopship. It was one of the biggest steamboats at the time. And while they were making her a troopship one of the burners started it on fire accidently. It started on fire. So that changed our plans, instead of going to Europe or Africa we went to the Pacific. We went to San Francisco staging area for overseas.

S: When did you know you were going to the Pacific Theatre? Was there any indication given, were you told that the Normandy had burned and that's why you were going to the Pacific or maybe did your address change?

T: No, they told us we were going to go to the Pacific on account of the boat being burned. We were going to go to the Pacific instead.

S: What kind of impression do you think you left on the townspeople of Hattiesburg, Mississippi?

T: Well, as far as I'm concerned I think I left a good impression but I know that there were a lot of soldiers that were mean, bad down there.

S: What kind of reception did you get down there once the war started? Or even before the War? Was there any shift in attitude towards the Army?

T: No, I don't think there was. I don't think they cared for the soldiers down there too much. No, I don't think they cared for the soldiers at all down there. I went to Hattiesburg a few times. I went down to New Orleans. I think the people in New Orleans were a little better than the people in Hattiesburg. You can't blame the people in Hattiesburg because I think we had 90,000 soldiers there and they only had something like 23,000 in the town. and that was the closest town to Camp Shelby. I'm pretty sure that if you have that many soldiers around you're not going to like them.

S: Did you get any kind of feeling that they didn't like you because you were a Yankee?

T: Well, I didn't get that feeling. I didn't get that feeling. Like I said, I behaved and I got along pretty good with them.

S: Okay. Now the Division went to New Zealand, is this correct?

T: Yes, that's the first place. Actually, we went to New Zealand for the simple reason that Fiji could not handle a whole division at one time. So they sent part of us to Fiji and part to New Zealand and about a month later then we were sent to Fiji. We were sent to Fiji because Fiji they claimed would be about the next spot the Japanese would try to take over. And we were there to defend it, but as it was the Japanese never did get to Fiji. The Americans had started to offense themselves which the first one was Guadalcanal. We were not in Guadalcanal in ground combat. The Marines were there with the Americal Division and after they left we went to defend Guadalcanal.

S: What kind of reception did you get in New Zealand, do you remember?

T: Oh, it was very nice. The people there treated us real nice in New Zealand. I know a lot of people invited us in for dinner. We'd go into some homes for dinner. The reception was real good in New Zealand, very nice.

S: They were happy to see G.I.'s?

T: Yes, yes, they were very happy to see us there.

S: Okay, you went to the Fijis and then Guadalcanal, is that right?

T: Yes, we went to Guadalcanal.

S: What did you do at Guadalcanal?

T: Well, it was basically to defend it because the Japanese were in the Solomon Islands of which Guadalcanal is a part of. And even though we, the 37th, did not see no ground action on Guadalcanal, we were bombed every day, three or four times a day, because the Japanese were trying to knock us out of there because that was our initial step towards Japan. They used to bomb us two or three times everyday.

S: Were they heavy raids?

T: Yes, some of them were very heavy. Then one day there they tried to knock Guadalcanal out altogether and there was hundreds of planes in the air. But our American planes had intercepted them over the ocean and we saw a great battle that day, the American's and Japanese planes. And of course, the Americans won out so they never did knock Guadalcanal out.

S: What company were you assigned to?

T: I was in Company H, 145th Infantry, 37th Division. It was heavy weapons, heavy mortars and heavy machine guns.

S: The whole company was?

T: The whole company was, yes. It had water-cooled machine guns, 81 millimeter mortars. I was section sergeant in the 81 millimeter mortars.

From Guadalcanal we took off for New Georgia, which was our first combat.

S: What were your feelings going there knowing that you are going to face combat for the first time?

T: Well, the feeling is hard to explain. You're a little scared. You're always scared, you're always scared, but you keep on going forward regardless. Then you start seeing casualties. I think my first casualty that I saw was a doctor and a priest on New Georgia. And you get a sort of funny feeling, but you keep going.

S: When the shooting starts, does it seem real at first?

T: It sure does. (Laughter) Yes, it sure does. You're a little scared and you have to shoot back, that's all. I was an 81 millimeter mortar. My main purpose was to give supporting fire to the infantry. That was a close-up artillery for the infantry there. And my job was that I would be in the front all of the time with the captain. Any-place he wanted supporting fire I would give it to him. I would call back to the mortar position, give them the direction and how many shells to fire.

S: So you were like an O.P. [observation post]

T: Yes, I was a forward observer, that's what a section leader is. I was a forward observer for the 81 millimeter mortars. And I was always in the front.

S: Do you remember calling support fire a lot?

T: Oh yes, we called for many support . . . mortars was a very important weapon in the infantry. The riflemen had their own too. They had the sixty millimeter but ours was the heavier one if they wanted to knock out maybe a pillbox or get smoke to smoke a side. There was a chemical shell we used to use.

S: Explain the type of shells that were used.

T: There was three types of shells in the 81 millimeter. We had what we call a personnel shell. It's a seven pound. Then we had one that was for demolition that was a fifteen pound shell. Then a chemical shell that was for smoke.

S: And you would use these for different purposes?

T: Yes, well, if it was only personnel we would use the seven pound.

S: That was shrapnel contained?

T: A shrapnel contained shell, yes. The chemical was smoke for the . . . if you wanted to advance or if you wanted to maybe obsure one side for an advancement, we would use that. And the heavier shell was for maybe a pillbox, if you wanted to knock a pillbox out.

S: Was a mortar a fairly accurate weapon?

T: A mortar was a very accurate weapon, yes, it was a very accurate weapon.

S: What kind of terrain did you find on New Georgia?

T: It was a jungle-like. There was one thing bad about it, it had no water, which is odd for a South Sea island, not to have water. But they had no water there. The only water we had was a big shell hole that the American bombs had left there and there was always snipers around when you went to get water too.

S: Was that a problem?

T: Yes, well, we'd all have to get out after that sniper, try to get him. But that was our only water that we had to drink. Bathing, forget about bathing. When we took the Munda Airfield there that was the end of that war there, we smelled, I'll tell you, we couldn't stand each other. We couldn't take baths, and they tried a one-piece suit on us, which I think they should never do not in the jungles because it got too hot. It got too hot on us. And they were trying something new but I tore mine up to get some air into it. A one-piece suit was no good in the jungle.

S: Were there a lot of insects? Was it a tropical island?

T: Yes, well, that's all the South Sea islands, all tropical islands where we were I guess. The main thing we had troubles with is what they called the land crabs. There was more shooting at those crabs than the Japs because at nighttime they sound just like a human being coming through the brush. We never fought in the nighttime in the jungle. We would dig in and then stay in the hole. Then in the morning we would take off again because it's hard having control in the daytime in the jungle let alone nighttime. So we would dig in, see, we'd make circles, we would dig in, there we'd hear these crabs coming through the brush. A lot of grenades thrown at them. That's the only thing we could use was grenades because we were not allowed to use rifles because there were too many men around dug in. But they sound just like a human being coming through the brush at night.

S: Was there a problem with Japanese infiltrators?

T: Yes, there was, not too much though. Not in New Georgia there wasn't, not too much in New Georgia. But, I'll tell you, one time we got in one spot there we sweared that there was one up in a tree shooting at us. We'd get our BARs [Browning automatic rifles] out and shoot those trees down and there'd be nobody up there. I think they had a trick shot that when they would hit the trees the shell would explode again and it sounded like they was in that tree. And right away we would get our BAR's Browning automatic rifle it was called and shoot down that tree and there'd be nobody up there.

S: Horseshoe Hill, do you remember that? I think it might also have been called Potato Hill on New Georgia?

T: I don't recall that, I don't recall. I know there was Wing Hill.

S: Well, that was part of it, yes.

T: Yes, Wing Hill. Oh yes, I was right there at Wing Hill. I know they had called me forward because there was some pillboxes they wanted knocked out, which we did. We were pretty lucky with a couple shots to get a couple of those pillboxes out.

S: Was that a difficult thing for mortars to do, to knock out a pillbox? Were they tough to knock out?

T: No, not with our heavy shell, not with our heavy shell, It was a delayed action thing. It would go into the ground and then explode. And I've seen many of them knock them out.

S: You knew that the fire you called for, could you see the results?

T: Yes, yes, I would see the results, yes. I'd be the man calling back the fire, giving the fire orders. I would see the shells come in. That's different than the artillery, your mortars, because artillery sometimes they fire from way back and they don't see their shells. They fire from maps. But the mortars, I'm right up there to see it, how they were firing.

S: Would you ever coordinate your mortar fires with air attacks?

T: Not that I know of, no, not with air attacks. With artillery, but not with air.

S: Okay, describe an attack on a pillbox, form the time that the infantry knew that an area was taped to the time that you saw where your shells were hitting. Exactly how would the assault take place? Was it a cautious assault?

T: Oh yes, it would always be a cautious assault because if they're in a pillbox, they're hard to get out. And the Japanese was a very good soldier. You had to get him or if there was only one left he would still keep firing at you and would never give up. So it was caution there. Once they would hit a pillbox they would call the mortars up and say, "We have some pillboxes that are in there and we'd like you to get some fire on them and get them out of there." Which we would do and after we'd fire they'd send the riflemen in or maybe flamethrowers or with the rifles they would go and shoot into these pillboxes. But mainly, they would get supporting fire to help them out.

S: Were you ever told to sort of, cool it, there's only so many shells, you're using too many? Or did you get the feeling that there was an abundance of ammunition, if you really need it there was no problem, you could fire as many as you wanted? Did you ever get the feeling that maybe they would say, "Hey, this is expensive stuff?"

T: Well, I think as far as I'm concerned, we had enough every time that I called for it. Being the forward observer and I would control the firing, I think, there was a couple times in Bouganville where they started to rust on us, the ammunition. We was having trouble with it. But I think we always had shells enough. They would bring them up, the supply company. But we had plenty of supplies, most of the time we did.

S: How was the ammunition brought to the front?

T: It was brought up by, well, in New Georgia the only thing that could go there was jeeps. Nothing else could go back through the jungles. It would rain and they'd get bogged down. Most of the things was carried on the backs, the water and everything. And they would bring them up so far and then they would have to be carried in.

S: Would you say that after the New Georgia campaign that the 37th was a veteran group now?

T: Yes, I think after the first shot you become a veteran. (Laughter) Yes you do and yes we were.

S: Were you ever shot at?

T: Oh yes. You mean directly? I know if I was shot directly at. I've had some close ones, I'll tell you that. I was injured in Bouganville by shrapnel but . . .

S: Well, let's get to Bouganville then. After the New Georgia campaign was over and the Munda airstrip was secured . . .

T: We went back to Guadalcanal of all places to go back for a rest, but that's the only place we could go.

S: What did you do there?

T: We, were still being bombed all the time, but we were preparing to go further north. So our next operation was Bouganville. The main object there was to secure an airfield, not to take the island, because the Japanese were on the other side of Bouganville and all we had was a perimeter with two divisions. There wasn't very many soldiers we had there. We sort of had an egg shell defense, not too much depth. And our main purpose there was to hold this airfield which was for operations further north, not to take the island. It was a rough job to do because the Japanese had I think it was the 6th Imperial Division that took part in the Rape of Nanking years ago. I know we were supposed to get a medal for it but we never did. Chiang Kai-shek got knocked out there in China.

We had a perimeter. I was on the hill, Hill 700, which was a very bad place. And I was on the side where we connected with the American Division. As a matter of fact it was our right flank and their left flank. We connected at the same spot there.

I was on the hill there where the Japanese had a path where they used to come through and that's where we built our pillboxes there.

S: Were you still with the mortars or . . ?

T: I was still with the mortars but I got in with my machine gun buddies. I didn't have to go down in there but at this time they were down there by themselves which they shouldn't be. Not the heavy weapons, it should be supporting element not the forward element. They're supposed to be supporting the riflemen. At this point here, we're way in the

front ourselves. We're on the forward slope of a hill just our heavy weapons at the time and the path came right into our dugout, pillbox. Well, we finally did get some riflemen to come to our sides to support us. Now, I didn't have to go down there but I figured, well, because me being an observer I should always be up high so that I can see. But being that they were down there by themselves and they were my buddies I went down there and stood with them.

S: Who were some buddies that were in there? Do you remember?

T: Yes. Tommy Mihalko, who just passed away, and Stellato and Tobias.

S: These were Youngstown boys?

T: These were Youngstown boys, yes. Youngstown area, Youngstown area boys.

S: Okay. I understand that there was three or four months from the time that you landed on Bouganville before you really got hit with the heavy attacks?

T: Yes, we, well see, the Marines made the initial landing there and I think they had just a little group of Japanese outposts there. And after they secured it we went in. And I think we stayed there about fifteen months. The Japanese were on the island all the time. They on one side of the island and we on the other side of the island.

And I was placed on top of the hill. We dug in and it was about three months before they really attacked us. I know a lot of intelligence reports came out, G2, saying the Americans are foolish people, or foolish soldiers rather, they're out there playing cards out on the front lines. (Laughter) They're paying no attention to what's going on. They were eyeing us and we didn't know about it but . . . I know one day there, our general came up to our spot and said, "This is where they're going to hit tonight, about two o'clock in the morning." We had captured some Japs and we got information from them. And, that was General Beightler who had come up and said, "This is where they're going to hit tonight." So we doubled our watch. We used to have one guy up at night, there were four of us in the pillbox.

We doubled it since he told us they were going to attack, so we doubled it. Mihalko and I stood up the first night and sure enough about 2:30 a.m., the general missed it by about a half hour, a riflemen to our left opened up. Opened up with his fire and he got two Japanese. Now over there we had trees overhead and we couldn't see nothing, there was no moon out. I don't even know how he saw shadows. He said, because I asked him the next day, "How did you see them? How did you know they were out there?" He said, "I thought I saw some movement out there and so I shot and I got two Japs." And they moaned all night and we knew that they were starting their attack.

S: Could you hear them?

T: Oh yes, I could hear them, and I called back for mortar fire because I had that place zeroed in see, that's what we had been doing, zeroing in. I called for mortar fire and we got that place all hit pretty good with mortar fire. And I could hear them moaning all night. They were moaning all night and they were laying in the brush where you couldn't see them. So, well, we stopped them, we stopped them from coming through our section.

S: Was there machine gun fire at this time, also?

T: Yes, we had machine gun fire and mortar fire into the brush and like I said we could hear them moaning all night.

S: But you couldn't see them?

T: You couldn't see them, no. The next day when I got up, see, we had prepared this place with a double apron of barbed wire and a single apron, see in case they got through the double we had the single. They had cut all this barbed wire without us hearing them. They cut it out completely, it wasn't even around! See, these two guys might have been the ones who were cutting it when they got it in the gut. They had cut the wire out altogether and it was only fifteen yards in front of us. They had cut all of this double apron and single apron protective wire out without us even hearing it.

S: Was that a sobering experience to wake up the next morning to see that they were that close?

T: (Laughter) Well, yes. Yes it was, but then the next day they attacked at Hill 700 which was to my left not too far away. And they took it. They took it, and it took a lot of American boys to get that back because it was a high spot, you couldn't get at them. But they finally got it back. And down below from us, down at the base of 700, they were always sneaking in at night and in the morning they would have to try and get those positions back.

S: So, there was a lot of infiltrating?

T: Yes, yes there was, oh yes there was, during the night. The Japanese was a very good soldier. It was a fight to the end.

S: Would you call him a dirty fighter? Is there such a thing as a dirty fighter?

T: No, there's no such thing as a dirty fighter. But the next day we went out there and there was Japanese dead all over the place. That's where I picked up my rifle that I have at home right now, small rifle that I have. But you had to be careful when you went about emptying them, because a lot of times they pretended that they were dead and they were getting ready to throw a grenade at you.

S: Did you see that happen? Or did you just hear about that happening?

T: Well, they were to our left, see, and I wasn't there at that spot. I was at where we had kept them from coming through. And then the next day they went to another spot and they broke through. But, I went up there to look at it and like I said these Japanese were dead all over the place and that's where I picked up my rifle and sent it home. They broke in through a couple times, and every time we had to push them back. We had a very big naval barrage there many times too, and we would go down and see the jungle after this barrage and there wouldn't be nothing there, it would all be blown apart.

And while I was at my spot there the next day we went out, the rifle company took a patrol out, a squad. Captain Duncan took a squad to go investigate and we no sooner got out of our hole, we went with them, Tommy Mihalko and I, we didn't have to, I said, "Let's go with them on that patrol," we no sooner got out of our hole when a machine gun opened up on us, a Japanese,

And the only reason that he didn't get us, he was on the forward slope of the hill and he couldn't depress his machine gun, otherwise he could have got us with one burst, the whole squad of us. But one of our BAR men, Taylor from E Company, opened up fast and got him.

I had a lot of respect for Captain Duncan. I saw him do a lot of things he should have got the Medal of Honor for.

S: Like what?

T: Well, in Bouganville, he led this squad to get this machine gun. And he led; he wasn't behind telling the guy pushing, he was the leader. And when I went with him, he was leading us too. He was the leading man. Of course, now I'm not going into the Philippines, when I saw him really do something he should have got . . .

S: Well, go ahead.

T: Well, after we left Bouganville, we went to . . . well, let me finish Bouganville first.

S: Okay.

T: We left Bouganville, the Japanese were still there, they had knocked out the field many times with their artillery pieces. They would silence them and then we'd fix it up again. The Japanese had artillery up in the mountains and at nighttime they would open up, or even in the daytime. I could hear these shells going over my head going down to the rear, hitting our field. Dive bombers would go up to these mountains, trying to get these artillery pieces. I don't know for sure, but I think they were in caves because they could never get them. And every so often they would open them up. And I could hear the shells going over my head to the rear hitting our airfield.

But after a certain length of time we had to move on, we had to keep going north. But there were still Japs on Bouganville and as we left the Australians came in and took over. They took care of it. I think it belongs to England, but the Australian soldiers controlled Bouganville. And we heard later on that they had a lot of trouble with the Japanese when we left. We went to the Philippines.

We made the initial landing of Luzon which is the main island of the Philippines. Linguyan Gulf, we landed in Linguyan Gulf. We came there through the night and

we pretended we were going to pass it, bypass it, and pretended that we were going to Japan. And then we turned around and came back into the Philippines. And there was a big naval barrage for us to make our initial landing on Luzon, which is the main island.

S: The convoy, did it come under air attack at all?

T: Yes, I remember one of those suicide planes. I remember one time I was on top of the deck of the boat and one leveled off at us. And we were all told to go down in the boat. And I thought that sure he was going to hit us, but he didn't, he got the boat to the left of us, and just temporarily stopped it, and they made a quick stop and then kept going. I think they just temporarily stopped it.

Oh yes, they attacked us many times and we could always hear a lot of naval boats firing, even U-boats, or not U-boats, submarine boats.

And we landed on the Philippines and I remember when the Navy was landing us they were so anxious to get us off that they dumped us in the water. They hit a sand bar and dumped us in the water. We had to walk out with our heavy weapons and good thing it wasn't over our heads, but they were anxious to get out of there.

S: Good thing you weren't getting fired on!

T: Yes, we weren't at the time, but they were scared that they were going to start. So, we landed in the Philippines, but the Japanese were mostly on the run here. They would leave a few men back just to hold us back and they would keep going, keep running. And I remember one time there, see I was attached to E Company, my mortars, even though I was H Company, I was always attached to E Company. I would take my section with E company and go along with the company and they would ask me to put my 81 millimeter mortars into the fire. And I remember this one time, where they split us up, the E Company, to get around the river and try to get the Japanese going across it. And I was attached to E Company then, and I went along with E Company. We got at this one point where there was a bridge and there was a big battle going on there. I remember, the captain, he called me up to put fire on the left, I mean smoke to the left side of this river so he could go across this river because we had this platoon of men pinned down. Now this is the spot where I thought the man should have gotten the Congressional Medal of Honor.

S: This was Captain Duncan?

T: Captain Duncan, yes. He got a couple natives to bring a couple of boats and he swam across with the boats to bring these boys back. And I seen that with my own eyes. I gave him smoke to the left to keep the Japanese from seeing him going across and we had an armored vehicle on the right firing to try and keep the Japanese fire down there. And he brought them across and he was put in for the . . . But at that time the battalion commander or the regimental commander asked Captain Duncan to keep coming across the bridge. Before that river there was a lot of fish ponds and all the men had their rifles full of mud and the captain called back and said, "You're going to have to give me a few hours to get these rifles back in shape and get the mud offof them." And that's what they got mad about. He was put in for the Congressional Medal but I think that's the only reason that he didn't get it because he didn't go across when they told him to.

I remember, well, we did cross the bridge there. He had asked me to take a patrol out there. There was a little village down there. I usually didn't do that because I was a heavy weapons man. But since his men had to clean their guns out I took the squad out with a couple of Filipinos who knew the area, but there was nothing there so I took them back. There was a lot of Japanese killed there and a couple horses killed there too. And that was the first time that I couldn't eat, the smell and the stench. (Laughter) I almost every other time I could, but this time they brought soup up which I wanted to eat so bad but I just couldn't eat it, I don't know why, the stench was so bad.

S: Let me ask you, after a fight was over, this is a job that has to be done but nobody likes to talk about it, who buried the Japanese? Do you know? Who took care of that detail?

T: Well, I'll tell you, being a forward man, I didn't see too much of that because we had to keep going forward. We had to keep going forward.

S: Especially on the Philippines.

T: Yes. To me when I saw a Jap, being that he was the enemy, I didn't think too much of it, unless I saw an American, then I felt real bad. But it would be, I think the medical field people would take care of it. I know after Bouganville, they used to use bulldozers to dig a trench and bury them that way.

But anyway, after we left this one spot where I thought Captain Duncan should have gotten the Congressional Medal of Honor, man, he was a brave man all the way through, we headed for Manila then.

We started going down the road and one morning we were cleaning our weapons to take off and I think there were some Marine tanks there that went ahead of us and they came back and said that there was nothing up ahead. So, we started down this hill and they opened up on us, I think they were 88's. And believe it or not, I seen that shell come down the road and I wasn't the only one that saw these shells coming down the road. They'd hit the road and bounce up and hit in the back. And we had some casualties in the rear of us from these. In fact I even had my good buddy killed at that time, Shirk from Youngstown and Vanatsky. I was right behind him. A shell hit a tree or something and got Shirk and Vanatsky.

But we continued towards Manila on this road and I know one place there, the Japanese were bombing all the buildings. They were using the airplane bombs to bomb these buildings. One time there, my goodness, I didn't know what it was, but it was such an explosion and here it was an airplane place where they had airplane bombs and exploded it. Well, we passed Clark Field.

S: On your way to Manila?

T: We were coming close to Manila then. We come to the Passig River, that's where we stopped for a while. And I was using my mortars to hit certain targets on the river. We crossed, they had what they called Bailey Bridges because the bridges were all blown up. And they would put these bridges up in no time at all, just put them across. In fact, I have some pictures of them. And it was right outside of . . . when we crossed the Passig River, it was outside of Wall City. That was the old city, Manila, old Manila, and I forget what the thickness of that wall was, sixteen feet or something like that. I was right near the post office and that was all bombed out near a theatre. I saw artillery come right up there point-blank trying to make a hole through this wall, which they did and we got through. But the Japanese were on the run and they were leaving enough back just to delay us. We finally took Manila, I think we were one of the first in Manila, the 37th Division and we M.P'd [military policed] it for one month, that was our rest. From the time we hit Linguyan Gulf we were on the go for three months there, all steady

day and night. That was supposed to be our rest, we M.P.'d it. But the Japanese had fled to the mountains then and we were after them there. As we hit the mountains I came home. They picked me to come home.

S: You were on rotation?

T: Yes, it was only a couple of more months and the War had ended but I had come home. They picked me up from the field of battle to come home so that's how it was.

S: That was unusual, was it not?

T: Yes it was, but a lot of times they had picked a man out and he got killed before they could send him home. So they said as soon as we pick a man out we're going to send him home, which happened to me. I had a lot of points, I should have gone home way before I did, but I didn't.

At any rate, when I got picked out they put me in the back as an ammunition carrier for a while and man, there was a lot of snipers along that route. I didn't know whether I was safer up front or on the ammunition carrier. But anyway, we headed north then to get a plane to go to Leyte and from Leyte I took a boat home. And coming home, I didn't think I was going to make it home. I was in a Liberty boat and we hit a storm. I don't know if you know what a Liberty boat is. Kaiser made them out there in no time at all and they were known to split in two. I thought surely ours was going to split in two because we hit a storm and here of all times coming home I didn't think I was going to make it. But we finally drove out of the storm.

S: Were there heavy seas?

T: Yes, it was monsoon time. They had the monsoon storms at that time and we just happened to hit a storm at that time. But I made it to San Francisco and in seven days I was a civilian. That was hard to believe. I was on the field of combat maybe just two weeks before that and here I am a civilian.

S: What was your reaction to that? Were you happy to be out of the Army?

T: Yes, I really didn't mind it too much but it seemed like the last couple months in the Philippines I was getting weary because we were going steady day and night, sleeping on the ground, getting shelled, fighting. I took it pretty good all the way through till the last couple months I was getting weary, I was just getting too much of it. I forget how many days we had of combat, five hundred some days of combat. That's not fighting there, but you're under combat conditions.

S: Do you think the Army was a good experience for you?

T: I've always said I wouldn't take a million for the experience but I'd hate like heck to go through it again.

S: Tokyo Rose, did you ever listen to Tokyo Rose?

T: No, I didn't, no. Some of the guys did but I didn't. I was always up in the front and a lot of the guys were where they could get more things, but I was usually in the front.

S: You said on Bouganville you had a problem with ammunition or shells that were rusting. Did you ever get the feeling that, or were you frustrated at all, that most of the good stuff was going to Europe and that maybe you were a backdoor type of operation?

T: Well, there was a lot of times we did think that we should have had more than we did. But, I don't know, it seemed though that a lot of times, I think we had a lot of ammunition there. But like in Bouganville it did get rusty.

S: What was the problem with a rusty piece of ammunition?

T: Well, with a mortar you just drop the shell in and the shell has what they call burlings around it, it's like a piston ring. And if those things would get rusty, well, they would stick in there. We had a detail one time with sandpaper to get that rust off.

S: If it stuck in there would it explode? Or would you have to what?

T: Well, I never seen it but they said one time there that one did just come out, out of the barrel and that's all. But most of the time, like I said, I was a forward observer and most of the shells that I saw were good.

There was only one shell that hit behind me one time and that was a chemical shell. Chemical shell was not accurate because the liquid inside would wobble, but I never used too many of those. I would zero in with the live ammunition more than with chemical because they were more accurate. But I've always seen or observed all my shells that I would call for, I'd see them.

S: Okay. How about the USO [United Service Organization] shows? Did you get to see any of those?

T: Not too much.

S: Who did you see?

T: I think Joe E. Brown. I don't know if I saw Bob Hope or not, I don't remember that well. Who's the guy with the violin?

S: Jack Benny?

T: Jack Benny, yes, Jack Benny. And I think I saw Randolph Scott. He came up the hill on Bouganville.

S: Did you talk to him?

T: Yes, we got to talk to him.

S: What did you talk about?

T: Oh, well, a lot of the men were just bitching at him. (Laughter) And I couldn't see that. The man didn't have to be there but he was there. His guitar player couldn't make the hill. He was a heavy set man and he couldn't make the hill so we didn't get no guitar music. He was nice, but we didn't get to see too much entertainment. And the USO, we didn't get to see to much of that either. At one point I hadn't seen a woman for two years. That's right. In Bouganville there was some native women in Bouganville that were on the other side. Then towards the end they started bringing them over. I think they were trying to get away from the Japanese. But at one point I hadn't seen a woman in two years.

S: When was the first time you saw a WAC [Women's Army Corps] or a WAVE [Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service]?

T: A WAC was in the Philippines. That was the first time I seen them, when they came in the Philippines. I saw a truckload of them but I was always on the move.

S: Let me ask you this, did you have faith in the 112th Medical Battalion? Did you ever feel that if you got hit that they would get you back and patch you up?

T: Yes, we had good medical men. Oh yes, they were always around. Yes, they were always around. And then we had our company medics who were with you at all times. Yes, the medics were good.

S: Now you said that you got wounded, is that right?

T: Yes, I got shrapnel in Bouganville, in the head. It came right through our window and hit, I had a Marine dish there, a stainless steel, and it went through it and hit me on the head. And it was a glancing blow. If it was solid I probably wouldn't be here today. It cut my head.

S: But you stayed on the line?

T: Oh yes, at first aid they wanted to take me off but I didn't think it was that bad. I had gone that far with the men and I didn't want to leave. So the first aid man put sulpha milamide on my head and patched me up. That was it. But it wasn't bad.

S: Describe a pillbox, one of your pillboxes.

T: Well, we had a lot of time to build ours like on Bouganville. Now we were there for three months before the Japanese decided to try to knock us off the island. So we dug a big hole, it was great big because there were four or five of us in the hole and we would chop some trees down and put them on top. And we'd get sand bags and fill them up with sand and put them on top of that. Now, its a good thing we did because when the general came up there and told us they were going to attack us that night, they brought some reinforcement in back of us. Now these guys, all they could do was dig holes. They didn't have time enough to put a top on. We got shelled. We got artillery shelling us and every man behind us had to be carried out. Every man that was behind us dug in and had to be carried out. We had a very good pillbox because we had plenty of time to do it. Oh, we got shelled many times with artillery shelling. Zeroed in.

S: What was that like?

T: Well, when you got a pillbox like that it wasn't too bad. You had to watch any shrapnel coming in like what got me, but all you could do was just lay down and hope. That's right. There's many guys whose nerves would break but I always felt that if I could just make my mind blank when something like that happened you would get away from neurosis, because there were many men I saw break down.

S: Is that where the expression, "The two thousand yard stare," came from?

T: I don't know. I never heard that before. But that's the way I would do it. I would just try not to think about it, try not to think about it. I know one time on New Georgia I got pinned down on top of a hill, they were zeroing us in. I'd try not to think about it because if you do it's going to get you. I remember people asking me, "Well, how do you feel when you're getting shelled and you don't know if the next shell is going to get you?" Well, the way I get out of it was by not trying to think of it, by trying to make my mind blank in these particular times. That's the way I tried to get around it.

S: How would you rate the Japanese soldier?

T: Very good. I would say if he had the equipment we had I think we'd still be fighting. He is a hard man to beat. He was a small man but a very sturdy man. He wouldn't give up. I know one time we was on our way to Manila there, the whole regiment and there was just one Japanese with a machine gun holding us up. He wouldn't give up. In Europe, they gave up by the armies, but not the Japanese. In Bouganville I saw twelve men captured and the only reason they were captured was because they were shell-shocked, otherwise they wouldn't have gave up. They were a very steady, sturdy, hard fighter. He believed that if he died hewas going to go to heaven, that made him a fanatic.

S: Did you ever see any banzai charges?

T: No, no banzai, like I said, we belonged with the supporting weapons, we were here and there and I didn't see no banzai.

S: Did you see any bodies that had maybe self-inflicted wounds, they had commited hari-kari or whatever to avoid capture?

T: No, I didn't see any. There might have been some but like I say, when you're a front line man, you keep going, you don't fool around. You keep going but a lot of guys in the rear would see all that stuff, but when you're a front line fighting man you don't get to see all that.

S: Did you see by Manila or in the Phillippines at any time any of these civilians who had been massacred, any atrocities like that?

T: I knew they were in there because as you would pass these buildings you could smell the human flesh. And if you ever smelled human flesh, its the smelliest thing there is. Human flesh smells worse than anything when they're rotting. Oh, I've seen bodies right in front of me on Bouganville, bugs get in them and all I would see was a grease spot, and the clothes, and the bones, that's all. In two days only, over there it is so hot, the maggots would get you in no time at all. Your body would dissipate in no time at all. I know on Bouganville, we had two right in front of us, that's how close they got to us. And the smell, I'm telling you, whew! I was able to eat there. There's only one time I wasn't able to eat because there was dead horses among the Japanese too, and that smell. But otherwise I wanted to eat.

S: Did you drink any sake?

T: Yes, one time only, when we took New Georgia, took the Munda airfield, some fellows had some bottles. And we drank a little but not too much. Some of the canned meat they had there was pretty good. We opened it up and we ate canned meat.

S: When you were on these transports going to say, the Phillippines, or to Bouganville, how were you treated aboard ship by the Navy personnel?

T: Oh, we were treated all right, but I sure didn't like those trips. They were miserable. They were small boats with all the equipment and hot. You'd get up on deck and there'd be no shade. It was always hot down in the South Seas. But, the naval, they treated us well. I didn't particularly care for boats. I think we had about three and a half months on the ocean there as an infantryman, from one island to another island, they were miserable moving. Most places we had to go up and down the rope ladders with our equipment. There was no docks there to get off on.

S: How did you feel once you got right on the outskirts of Manila and the 37th Division was ordered by General MacArthur to get off the road and let the 1st Cavalry go into Manila first?

T: Well, we felt bad about it because we had fought every inch of the way, and here they were coming in on trucks. But we got there about first too. He wanted the 1st Cavalry because that was his outfit in World War I and he wanted them to get the glory.

S: Did you think that maybe was more of a political move than a military move? The 1st Cavalry was regular army and not National Guard?

T: Well, that could be but I thought it was mainly because it was his outfit, MacArthur's outfit. I never thought too much of MacArthur myself. I thought he was a show-off and I didn't particularly care for him. For awhile we were under Halsey, Bull Halsey, he was naval. I thought he was a good general. But, I always thought MacArthur was a show-off. I always did. I didn't care too much for him.

S: What did you think of General Beightler?

T: He was a good general. We liked him. Yes, we all liked him.

S: What was your reception like on the Phillippines by the people? Did everyone seem to say that they were guerilla fighters?

T: Yes, they were friendly and they tried to tell you that they were guerrilla fighters but they weren't. The real guerrilla fighters I saw, they came down from the mountains. And I know I seen one of them, where a woman was one of them. She had a .45 on her side and was the leader with a band of guerrillas. They were really guerrillas there. They had lived up in the mountains all those years.

When a top Japanese officer was captured, he rode in a car with General Beightler, who commented on how amazed he was at the enthusiasm the Filipinos had for the Americans by putting up two fingers and shouting "Victory Joe." The Japanese officer said the Filipinos showed the same enthusiasm for them when they were victorious.

Oh yes, another time there in Guadalcanal, they had told us that they had shot down Admiral Yamamoto. They

told us at the time they had intercepted a coded message and he decoded it and they had got him, they had told us while we were in Guadalcanal they told us that.

They used to attack us many times at night. I remember, we saw a movie in Guadalcanal, The Pride of the Yankees.

S: Yes, someone else had mentioned that.

T: The Pride of the Yankees, and I'm telling you, we wanted to see that so bad that it took us all night to see it. Because everytime we would go out there for five minutes, we'd hear the airplanes coming over bombing us. We'd all have to run to our dugouts and get in our dugouts. After awhile we'd go back out again and it took us almost all night to see that movie. We all wanted to see it so the officers said,"well, if it takes all night, we'll see it".

S: Can you remember your feelings about the first time that you fired a gun? Did you ever fire a gun in anger?

T: Yes, I did. Well, my main thing was not a rifle or pistol. My main thing was the mortars.

S: Right.

T: But there was a couple of cases I fired my rifle.

S: Do you think you hit anyone?

T: No.

S: What were your feelings the first time when you called for mortar support? Did you have a hate for this enemy? Was it a personal hate or was it more just a job? That you figured he was just here on orders like you were?

T: Yes, well, when somebody is after you, to kill you, you're out to kill him, that's all. Well, I did hate him too because he's the one who attacked Pearl Harbor, the Japanese. Not the soldier because he probably didn't even know what was going on. I don't like to see anybody killed, but if they're going to kill you, you have to kill them. That's the only way you're going to win it.

S: Now, before you went into combat, the first time at New

Georgia, did you talk to any Marines that fought on Guadalcanal? Did they tell you any stories about how the Japenese fought?

T: Well, we did talk to some of the Americal Division on the Fiji Islands when they came back to rest on Fiji Island.

S: Did they help you?

T: Yes, well, I know one of them was the brother of Stellato, the guy I was in the hole with. He had come over there and we asked him, "How do you feel, being in combat?" He said, "Hey, you just keep going. You're scared, but you keep going, that's all." Like I told you about being scared, you just keep going. That's the only people we ever talked to about combat before we got into it, the Americal Division. They had got into it before we did. But they were with us on Bouganville, the Americal Division.

S: Were they a good unit?

T: Well, I don't know for sure but there were supposed to be some of their units that weren't too good. In fact, one unit was supposed to have lost their colors.

S: What do you mean, "lost their colors?"

T: They weren't good in combat. One regiment was supposed to have lost their colors. But, we had an outfit there on Bouganville too, the 93rd Division, and they weren't too good either, they had to take them out.

S: Did you ever experience or see any hand-to-hand fighting?

T: No. I don't think anybody would as long as they had shells in there, I don't see why they should.

S: What was your opinion of say, the 169th Infantry? I think they were on New Georgia, in fact, I think the 145th Infantry had to replace them in the line. Do you remember them at all?

T: On New Georgia?

S: Yes, the 169th.

T: No, I don't remember them.

S: Okay. How about the Marines? Do you think the Marines are...what was your opinion of the Marines?

T: I don't think they were any better. They were just like anybody else. They trained to fight and I don't think they were any better than anybody else. They were just as scared as the next man. They're human beings just like anybody else, they could be your brother or my brother. They're the same person. They're trained different to fight but I don't think they're any better.

S: How do you mean they train different?

T: Well, to make beachheads. We were trained for that too, but that's their main thing, to make beachheads.

S: Did you get the opinion that they thought they were better than anybody else? I think their motto is, "the first ones in and the last ones out."

T: Well, I don't think they're better than anybody else. I can't make myself believe that.

S: But did they think that?

T: Well, I think every unit thinks they're the best. I think everybody does. I thought we were the best and I thought our division was the best. But I think everybody has to have pride in their outfit if they're going to be any good. You have to have pride in it. But as far as their being any better fighters I don't see how. I think we had a lot of regular army men with us and I didn't see where there was any difference. The civilian soldier is a good soldier. Just as good as any of them. There was no Marines used in the Phillippines in that big combat. There was no Marines used in there. We did all right by ourselves. We made our own beachheads and... But they're an American outfit and I hope they do good.

S: Did you have to call down mortar fire on Manila itself? What did Manila look like after the battle was over?

T: Well, it was all, the Japanese bombed a lot of the buildings themselves. You know, we had an order one time from General MacArthur not to fire into the buildings. Until we told him, hey, we can't have a guy with a machine gun up in a building firing down on us. We have to do something to get him out of the way. So he finally did give us the order that we could. But General MacArthur, I guess he owned a lot of buildings in Manila and I guess he didn't want them all blown up. (Laughter) But the Japanese were blowing them up anyhow. They were blowing them up.

Oh yes, I know that before we went across the river, I was with my mortars and I was hitting many places and starting many oil fires and hitting a lot of things. But then we crossed the river and like I said, they were on the run. They would leave enough just to hold you back so they could get out of the way and go back up into the mountains. Because we were starting north again. Like I said, I came home from there, from that point on.

S. Did you see any Imperial Marines?

T: I think they said that they were supposed to have been on New Georgia. Because when I saw them first I thought they was Americans. They looked tall and they had a green suit like we did too. I swore that they were Americans and they said, nah, those are Japanese. They must have been Imperial Marines.

S: Were they big, heavy-set fellows?

T: They were tall fellows. When I first saw them I thought they were Americans. But, no, they weren't. That's why I started moving my mortar fire because they had pillboxes in New Georgia.

S: Was the battle for Manila basically street fighting?

T: Yes, it was. Like I said before, they were always on the run. They headed for the mountains, and I didn't know what they were going to do up there but that's the only thing they had to do. But there was a lot of street fighting in Manila. The first street fighting we had to do because we had done mostly jungle fighting, on Bouganville and New Georgia.

S: When you hit the Phillippine beach, did you personally and did the Division as a whole, feel that the end was near, that the Japs were whipped?

T: Yes, we figured it was coming towards the end there, we didn't know how long they were going to really last. Because they had already prepared us for Japan. I was surely hoping that I wouldn't have to go to Japan because we would have had to kill women and children, they were that fanatic, you know. I was sure hoping that I would get out before we went to Japan. As it was we never had to go to Japan.

S: Now, about the soldiers themselves, yourselves, between action or say while you were waiting on Bouganville, before the attack, what did you guys talk about? What

What did you do for entertainment?

T: There wasn't too much entertainment on Bouganville. I stood in a hole there for 15 months. I dug a hole and that's where I lived. Yes, that's where I lived, in a hole for 15 months. Oh, we would get together and play cards but that's about the only entertainment we could have. There wasn't too much entertainment there in Bouganville. We had a couple of people come in like I told you, Randolph Scott, but that was occasionally. But there wasn't too much entertainment besides playing cards and we would drink. We never got too much drinks. I know this Tommy Mihalko, he was a good gambler, and he always would win, see? And he'd go down the Air Corps and buy whiskey. He'd pay $50. or $60. a bottle for it. But he would give me a little bit, but we didn't have too much to drink. Never had too much to drink.

S: What did you talk about? Did you talk about the War or things back home?

T: Mostly things back home, not about the War too much.

S: How was the mail service? Did you get a lot of letters from home? Did you write a lot?

T: I didn't write a lot. No, I didn't write a lot. I wrote to my wife, she wasn't my wife then occasionally. Then when we'd get into combat, well it would be months before I'd write a letter. I didn't write too much.

S: You weren't much of a writer?

T: No, I wasn't much of a writer.

S: Did you receive much mail?

T: Yes, I received some mail. Not a lot.

S: Did you have to watch what you wrote when you did write?

T: Yes, I know a couple times they censured mine and I didn't know why. I had nothing in it. I think you could have read the paper and found out more than what I had in it.

S: What would you write about?

T: Not too much. Like my wife said, I could have had a stamp because I wrote the same thing all the time. Not too much. I would write for her not to worry.

S: What would you write? Don't worry or what?

T: Oh, don't worry, I'm doing all right. You know, when you get in a place like Bouganville and the jungle there's nothing you can write about. What could you write about? All you could see was coconut trees and the ocean. There was nothing you could write about. If somebody does get hurt you don't write about it. I know two good buddies got killed and they were both singers from Youngstown, Shirk and Joe Volk, two of my good buddies.

S: Did you see that when they got hit or anything?

T: Joe became an officer. Joe Volk became an officer on Fiji. He wasn't in my outfit and he went in the 129th which was another regiment in the 37th Division. See, the 129th was picked up by the 37th Division later on, because he lost the one regiment some place, I don't even know how. So we picked up this regiment from Chicago, the 129th. And when Joe became an officer he went to the 129th and he wanted me to go with him but I said, "I'm staying where I'm at," I been with the boys that long and I was going to stay right there. And I was with the same outfit for four and a half years.

S: How about Shirk?

T: Shirk, he was a pretty good singer. He was more of a popular singer. He sang all of the popular songs. And I remember that morning we left, I was talking to him, and we were cleaning our rifles. And it looked like the War was coming to the end and he said, "You know Joe, I can't wait for this war to be over." He said, "I'm going to go down to Mississippi and pick up that Rebel of mine". An hour later he was dead.

S: Did you see him get hit?

T: He was in front of me. I didn't see him get hit but I seen him when they picked him up. Because he was just... I think there was a house in front of him and I was on this side and he was in front of me. See, he was a machine gunner, I was a mortar.

S: Well, can you think of anything else that maybe I haven't touched on, that maybe you'd like to say? Any experience, anything at all, training camp, when you got home. Were you surprised at maybe the attitude when you got home? What kind of reception you got?

T: Well, when I came home I went right to work. I didn't take no time off at all. A lot of guys would stay home for a year, you could have that [government] payment for a year. I didn't. I went right down to Sheet and Tube.

S: Was it hard to readjust?

T: No, not for me it wasn't. It wasn't very hard at all for me to readjust. I know a lot of these people come back and say they have to readjust. I don't know what they're talking about. To me, I was away for four and a half years and I come home and was no different. I don't know what some of these other guys are talking about, they have to readjust, they go to dope. You know in World War II, I never heard of anybody taking dope. They may have took a drink or a beer or whiskey but I haven't heard one man that took dope in World War II.

S: How about atabrine? What was atabrine?

T: Oh yes, I took that every day. That was for malaria. But almost everybody in the company had malaria but me. I don't know of anybody who didn't have it, there might have been one or two more. But almost everybody got malaria at some time or another.

S: How about sanitation facilities?

T: Well, you know, when you're in the field you have to dig your own hole and bury it. It was pretty good though, we were pretty well disciplined, our soldiers were. I know in Manila, north of Manila, I know one time there we were fighting two days to get across this river and when we finally did we had to dig in in a place there where people were going on top of the ground. Boy, and I had to dig in that and I could hardly stand it. Then the Japanese started burning all the buildings in front where we were at and we were told to withdraw and after fighting for two days we had to withdraw again. But then the Japanese took off. But what I'm trying to say about that sanitation that in Manila was terrible. We couldn't drink the water unless we put a some kind of a pill in it and let it stay for a half hour or so. Like I said, the women would go right on top of the ground and the men. They had no toilets. But that part was bad.

S: How about food? What was Army food like on the front line?

T: Well, we used to have cans. We used to have C-rations first and that was terrible.

S: What was a C-ration?

T: Rice and beans. Rice and canned beans.

S: It was cold?

T: Yes. And later on we started getting what they called a K-ration. It was a little better, but that C-ration was awful. You'd get those hard crackers with it, like cement. I only had one case of diarrhea and I think that was eating a C-ration. That was in New Georgia. Boy, I sure got a case of diarrhea that was something. No, it was the second one. Because when we was at Fiji I went to eat a steak one time down at Suva and it looked like a pretty good place, a nice clean place. And boy did I get diarrhea then. That's the only time I ate out of the Army too. But, food was pretty good in the Army. I can't complain about the food. It was pretty good. When they was able to bring you hot food up to the front lines, they would do it. They would bring a hot meal up if they was able to, if not, then you had your C-rations or your K-rations which you carried in your pack. I traded a C-ration one time for a chicken in the Phillippines. They all had chickens in the Phillippines, they raised chickens and just for a change they liked our C-rations and we would exchange some of them for a chicken.

S: Fijian troops. Did you have any Fijian troops with you?

T: Yes, I remember only in Fiji and New Georgia. They was good jungle fighters but otherwise they weren't too good.

S: They were undisciplined?

T: No, no, they were disciplined but I think they were more accustomed to jungle fighting than open warfare. They didn't use them too much, not too much. They were nice people. I like the Fijians. The Fijians are more like our Negroes in the United States. They weren't Polynesian, they were Melanesian. They were very nice people though. Of all the places I liked Fiji, a very nice place.

S: What were your thoughts when Japan surrendered? What were your thoughts on the atomic bomb being used? Did you think that was a good idea instead of sacrificing all the G.I.s?

T: Yes. At that time I thought it was because like I said, I would have hated to go to Japan because we would have had to kill everybody. And even though the atomic bomb done a lot of damage and killed a lot of people, I don't

think it was no where near the people that would have been killed if you would have had to go and invade. In Japan there would have been millions of people killed. So I think it's a hard thing to say, you know, you don't like to see people get killed like that, but I think that brought them to their knees much faster to surrender. And I don't blame President Truman, I think he done the right thing.

S: Okay. I'd like to thank you for this interview, with Joseph Trimacco on this the 18th of October, 1980. Thank you very much.

T: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW