

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
JAMES C. ANDERSON
Company Runner, Marine Corps, World War II
2004

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Anderson, James C. (b. 1925). Oral History Interview, 2004.

User: 2 audio cassettes (ca.84 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master: 2 audio cassettes (ca.84 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract:

James C. Anderson, a native of Dallas, Barron County (Wisconsin) reviews his World War II service with the United States Marine Corps in campaigns through the South Pacific, at Peleliu and Okinawa, and in immediate postwar China, his return to the States, and his use of the GI bill to create a postwar life. Anderson enlisted in the Marine Corps during his senior year of high school, March 1943. He covers his time spent in basic training and in advanced infantry training in San Diego (CA) and its limitations, and comments on a disagreeable voyage aboard troopship leaving San Diego harbor. A member of K Company, Third Battalion, Fifth Regiment, he describes his first action against the Japanese, at New Britain, where he sustained stomach and leg wounds. Anderson comments on the on-the-job training nature of combat in an account of the arduous struggle on Peleliu where a beloved Marine commander, Captain Andrew “Ack-Ack” Haldane, was killed. He relates the story of the repatriation of a captured Japanese flag taken off the body of a dead Japanese soldier encountered in one of Okinawa’s caves. Anderson recounts his time in a foxhole at Okinawa as reminiscent of what he had learned of World War I, but that nevertheless he had access to fresh vegetables and meat foraging nearby gardens and livestock. He comments on the reputation of the Japanese jungle fighter. With the Japanese surrender, Anderson’s unit was sent to China to guard the main airfield and to disarm the Japanese and assist in their return to Japan. He offers a brief observation on his reception by the Chinese and the class structure encountered. In China, Anderson received a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star for earlier actions. Allowed to select a souvenir, he left China with a Nambu pistol from the Japanese armory. Discharged at the Great Lakes Naval Station, he was given a stipend and train fare to Eau Claire (WI). Not desiring a farming life Anderson used the GI bill to recast his life as a mechanic, and later as a postal worker. He feels that the transition to postwar life was not difficult. While accepting war as it is, his experiences have left him with a renewed appreciation of everyday living and memories of nice people met.

Biographical Sketch:

Anderson (b. 1925) fought with K Company, Third Battalion, Fifth Regiment, United States Marine Corps in the Pacific Theatre during World War II. He saw action on New Britain, Peleliu, and Okinawa before being sent to China to provide guard service and assist in Japanese repatriation. He became a mechanic and worked for the US Postal Service for twenty years.

Interviewed by Todd Wagner, 2004

Transcribed by Patrick F. Gould, 2014

Edited by Channing Welch, 2015

Abstract written by Jeff Javid, 2015

Interview Transcript:

Wagner: This morning we are going to interview Mr. James C. Anderson. He served in the Marine Corps, World War II in the Pacific. My name is Todd Wagner. I am the Barron County Veterans Service Officer. Today's date is the 12th of November. This interview is being conducted at the Veterans County Service Office, and let's get started. Mr. Anderson, and I'll call you Jim?

Anderson: Sure.

Wagner: Okay. Want to talk about your background and your life circumstances before entering the military. You were born in what year?

Anderson: I was born May 2nd, 1925 near Dallas, Wisconsin. I was raised on a farm just west of Dallas, Wisconsin and lived on that until I was in high school. At that time when the war was on they'd let you enlist when you was in the last part of the senior year and your grades were up to snuff, and you could go in early. So I enlisted in in the Marine Corps, March 9th, 1943.

Wagner: Now when you enlisted, your mother and father were still living?

Anderson: They were at that time.

Wagner: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Anderson: One brother and one sister.

Wagner: Are you the oldest?

Anderson: No, my sister, her name was June, and she had already went to nurses training in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, and then she enlisted in the Navy. So she was in the Navy at that time.

Wagner: Okay, and your brother then must have been younger?

Anderson: He was too young.

Wagner: Too young for World War II. Okay, now you said you were pre-enlisted—

Anderson: Right.

Wagner: And you basically took off for basic training.

Anderson: Right.

Wagner: Headed for basic training. Now your basic training was conducted where?

Anderson: San Diego, California.

Wagner: Okay, and you say here in our notes that you went to basic infantry?

Anderson: Yes, the basic training, as I recall now, I was sent by train to Milwaukee and then out to San Diego and went through the basic training as like most basic training, eight weeks. And then when you get out of that basic training then they assign you to a specialty school. I didn't know where to go so I was assigned to a infantry, Advanced Infantry School.

Wagner: The train trip out, this was the first time you were outside of Barron County?

Anderson: Practically yes, yes, that's the truth.

Wagner: Let alone leaving the State of Wisconsin?

Anderson: Yes, that's right.

Wagner: So how was that train trip for you?

Anderson: Well, that train trip was very interesting. You get out to the central part of the United States. I forget what town it was where the train was met by ladies serving coffee and doughnuts, some major intersection for the train. But outside of that, each one had a sleeping berth, but you didn't have very much food to eat at that time.

Wagner: This was a troop train then?

Anderson: Mostly troops were going in for training, yeah.

Wagner: Now you reached San Diego. Do you have any recollections of how you were greeted by your Marine Corps drill instructors?

Anderson: Well—

Wagner: Did he give you a hearty handshake [Anderson laughs] and “Welcome to the Marine Corps”?

Anderson: No, he did not [Wagner laughs]. My sergeant that was the head of the training company that I was in was one of the most miserable persons that I ever met. He was extremely tough on us. He made us do a lot of things that I didn't think at that time was necessary, got us up in the middle of the night to run out in the boondocks and so forth. But he was very, very miserable to have as a headman.

Wagner: Did your opinion change of him after you got into combat?

Anderson: Well, to a certain extent. There was another drill instructor that served under the sergeant. He was a corporal, and he was not as tough as the sergeant, but I see that they have to do that to learn the basic information for how to do things.

Wagner: So you went through eight weeks of basic training. Then you went to advanced infantry training. So aside from physical training, the PT, you had marksmanship training, drill, how to wear the uniform, and this kind of thing.

Anderson: That's true. In the advanced one, they did teach us some things, especially went out and fired the rifles, and the BAR, Browning Automatic Rifles, pistols, and run the bayonet course. They taught you all these basics, but the few things that they didn't teach us that we could have used in combat, for instance, how to attack the pillbox. They didn't teach us that at that time. We had to kinda learn that in combat when we got into combat. So there was some things they taught us, but they cannot teach us it all, because I always said that one week of combat is better than six months of training.

Wagner: It would definitely get your attention.

Anderson: Yes, absolutely.

Wagner: So, as I understand what you're telling me is that the basic training course was just that. It gave you some basic fundamental knowledge, but you had some OJT, a lot of on the job training—

Anderson: Yes.

Wagner: Once you got into the field.

Anderson: Right.

Wagner: Because you had these obstacles that you had to overcome and you had to use your knowledge and your basic skills.

Anderson: Right.

Wagner: To put together and work as a team. Do you have any, do you remember any characters in your basic training group, your platoon that I think is what—that you went through basic with? Were there any people that stand out?

Anderson: When we went into training they kind of lined you up on your height. The front of the platoon was always the taller man, and the shorter guy, they called him "feather merchant," was on the back end. Next to me, because he was the same height, was an Indian from the Navajo Indian Reservation, and I understand that after he got out of basic training he went into the Indian talking unit. They corresponded back in forth in English, in the Navajo language so the Japanese could not pick up their talk.

Wagner: So he became one of the code talkers.

Anderson: Yes, absolutely.

Wagner: After your training and your advanced training and you got your first assignment, what was your first duty station? Where were you headed to?

Anderson: They took us down from our advanced training down to the San Diego harbor, and we marched through downtown San Diego, about eight or ten abreast, clear through the downtown San Diego and marched down to the transport that we was going to go overseas on. Of course, lined up on both sides of the streets were lots and lots of civilians, so they cheered and clapped for us at that time. We got aboard a transport and left San Diego for overseas.

Wagner: Now, this must have been summertime?

Anderson: Absolutely, yeah, I am guessing in the middle of the summer of 1943.

Wagner: So hot, very hot, humid, if you're marching ten abreast and you're going onto this transport I'm going to make the assumption it was very crowded. So, talk about the conditions.

Anderson: The climate in San Diego, California is a very mild climate practically year round, but when we got aboard this transport they put us down in the hold, and there was extremely crowded down in the hold of that ship. I think that there was probably about six or eight high in each one, and we didn't have any room to put our gear or anything else. As we left San Diego Harbor, about the first night out at sea, the captain of that ship was a new person, and he made all the troops go down in the hold, and he battened the hatches down and closed them down, and we was running out of oxygen. We was running out of everything down in that hold and it was extremely hot. No oxygen, pretty soon the fellows were taking their rifle butts and pounding on the hatches trying to get out of there. I guess the commanding officer went to see the ship's captain, and he say's "You can't keep them men down in the hole." So eventually the ship's captain left us out. And because of this experience I got kinda claustrophobia from that, but from then on, if possible, I slept right out on the deck of a ship.

Wagner: As long as the weather was good?

Anderson: Yes [laughs].

Wagner: Okay. So the conditions were not very good. You had six to eight high sleeping racks. Did you have good sailing weather?

Anderson: Yes, we had good weather. The food was not too good, and we got only two meals on that ship. We only got two meals a day. And then you had to stand in line for a long time to get your food, and you ate standing up. There was no sit down eating.

Wagner: So, did you have a lower rack or an upper rack?

Anderson: [laughs] I was lucky. I got down to the lower one. I didn't have to climb up into my bunk.

Wagner: So, now your first impression of the military after basic training, at this point in your military career, what were your impressions? Did you ever think about, maybe I shouldn't have left Barron County? [Anderson laughs] Or maybe I should have joined the Air Force or the Army or something like that?

Anderson: Yes, you're absolutely right, but you'd made your bed, and you had better lay in it. But a lot of things that I thought that they didn't have to be that strict and they still would have had a good person for the military.

Wagner: Okay, I see. Now once the ship, now what was the final destination of the transport you were on?

Anderson: We went to a very interesting town in the South Pacific, and the name of the island was New Caledonia. We got off the ship there and was taken by a truck to Noumea, which was the capital. And that was a French possession, and they spoke French, but we was only there for three or four days, and they shipped us out again.

Wagner: On the same ship?

Anderson: No, a different one.

Wagner: And the destination then was?

Anderson: We went from Noumea, New Caledonia to Milne Bay, New Guinea. That was, Milne Bay was just been taken away from the Japanese at that time, and there was still Japanese up in the hills. So, we had a camp there, but we had to go out on patrols up in the hills looking for Japanese.

Wagner: So, then your basic duties as an infantryman in the Marine Corps when you go on these patrols, you basically were a scout then?

Anderson: We was scouting looking for the Japanese. Luckily, we never ever got into a firefight there on New Guinea. This is the big island on New Guinea. But, we, on one of these patrols we run across a bunch of natives. We called them “Fuzzy-Wuzzys” because they had a lot of bushy hair. One time when we run across them, one of them fellows was carrying what I thought was a small kangaroo. They said that they’d killed it with a throwing stick. But, the right name for that animal was a wallaby. And a wallaby looks like a kangaroo, but it’s a lot smaller.

Wagner: And this was their—soon to be their meal?

Anderson: Yes.

Wagner: Did you ever have an opportunity to taste wallaby?

Anderson: No, I did not, thank goodness [both laugh].

Wagner: Okay. You said here that you met many very fine people and that you met a future senator from Illinois? Or he was a senator from Illinois?

Anderson: That's right. He had been the senator from Illinois, and he was attached to the battalion headquarters, and he'd once in a while would come up to our company. I was in K Company, Third Battalion, Fifth Regiment. And he'd come up there, and he would visit with our company commander. Not with me. He visited with the other people.

Wagner: But he was more or less a celebrity?

Anderson: That's right, you're right.

Wagner: How did you and your men feel about—here's a senator, an ex-senator? Were you impressed by that or by the fact that he was serving his country and not staying in Washington?

Anderson: I think he probably could have been resigned from his office being senator from Illinois. We all respected him because he was quite a lot older than all of us young guys so we respected him for coming over there and being where he was.

Wagner: After your meeting the "Fuzzy Wuzzys" and the wallaby, what was your next assignment?

Anderson: They put us aboard a LST. LST is a Landing Ship Tank. It's quite a large ship. They put tanks, amphibian tractors or so forth down in the bottom hold, and we could sleep up on top. We took this Landing Ship Tank up to the island of New Britain. New Britain is a very jungle heavy, growth island, and we landed in combat there on the part of New Britain that is called Cape Gloucester.

Wagner: Okay, now how soon after you landed, is this where you first encountered your first combat?

Anderson: Yes. We had to take about two days of hiking through malaria jungles. It rained every evening and wading in water up to your knees. And then about the afternoon of the second day as we actually hit the Japanese and engaged 'em in a firefight.

Wagner: What was your impressions of the firefight and your first initial combat?

Anderson: When we hit the Japs, they weren't exactly where I was. There was lots of shooting; different ones around me had been firing. I never fired a shot at that time, but they said that the Japanese had come rushing out of the jungle and tried to attack our boys, and our fellas drove them back with fire at that time. I did not see any Japanese. I never had a chance to fire my weapon, so I wasn't too excited at that time.

Wagner: Okay, how long did you stay in contact with the enemy during this session?

Anderson: The next morning after we'd had this little contact with 'em, we moved down off from a hill down toward a crick. I was second scout, one man in front of me about ten, fifteen feet. And as we got up to the bank of this crick, a Japanese machine gun cut loose, and this first scout went down. If I had been smarter I would have probably legged it back out of there. But anyhow, I crawled up to see how the man was, and he'd been shot up pretty bad, and as I stood up the machine gun cut loose again, rat-a-tat-tat. And I got hit in the side on the stomach, and they knocked me right down.

Wagner: And at this point you still haven't fired your rifle at anybody?

Anderson: I hadn't fired a single shot [both laugh].

Wagner: Okay. Now, did the rest of your patrol get up to you, pull you out?

Anderson: That's absolutely right. I started crawling back. I dragged my rifle. I took my pack off. I dragged my rifle back, and as I went back some of the other guys came up there to help drag me out of there, and we got—they helped carry me back up to the top of the hill to get out of the range of the fire.

Wagner: Line of fire. And then you were taken back to the aid station?

Anderson: Well, they, the medic bandaged up my stomach, and they put me on a stretcher, and they set me in an opening there. They was going to wait for an amphibian tractor to come up to haul out the wounded. Well, about that time here the Japanese laid a bunch of mortar shells in that area. And, as I was laying on my stretcher the mortar went off very close to me and filled my left leg with shrapnel. So I was wounded the second time. And there was only about a half hour in between.

Wagner: And you still haven't fired a shot?

Anderson: I hadn't fired [both laugh].

Wagner: Okay, now it says that—I see from your notes that you were on the front lines in three separate battles, and so we are talking about your first encounter now.

Anderson: That's right.

Wagner: Is, ah, once you were able to be recovered and you were taken back to the main area, got patched up, how long were you in recuperation?

Anderson: They took me out of the fighting there, and I went back to the beach, and they put me on a ship. They took me to New Guinea, and I was put in an Army hospital. I come in there, the Army hospital, my clothes is all mud and all blood and mud and everything else, and a female nurse come over and cut all of my clothes off. And of course that embarrassed me quite a lot at that time. She give me a bath, and they wheeled me right into this Army hospital operating. And they operated on me right there, and they extracted a bullet out of my stomach, and they took quite a few pieces of shrapnel out of my leg. Incidentally, this Army hospital was in tents. It had wooden floors, but in tents, and they could roll up the side of the tent, and there'd be a very, very nice breeze through that hospital. The man across from me was a Army mechanic, and he had been, he was telling me, he had been washing parts with gasoline, and the gasoline exploded, and he got burned over most of his body. And they had a rubber sheet underneath him, and the fluids was running out of his body. It was very, very bad, and he only lasted a couple of days. But I was treated very, very well in this Army hospital. I was in there a little over a month, and when they discharged me they give me all Army clothes, and when I come back to my outfit [Wagner laughs] here I was in Army clothes, and the rest of the guys was in Marine clothes.

Wagner: So, was there any repercussions because of the new clothing?

Anderson: Well, they kind of kidded me pretty heavy on that.

Wagner: Now you say here that you were in one battle where you had no food for five days.

Anderson: Well, that's a little later on.

Wagner: That's a little later?

Anderson: Yup. On this, when I came back I still was not in very good condition, and my commanding officer, his name was Captain Andrew Haldane. He said, "Well, you better take a couple more weeks on sick leave and so forth to get ready." And then I was assigned to company headquarters as a runner because of my bad leg.

Wagner: Now, what kept you going through all of this?

Anderson: Well, the main reason I figured is if other guys could do it, I should be able to keep up my end of the operation as well as anybody else.

Wagner: So, you were a runner, and basically you were making do, I mean getting healed and dealing with the shrapnel in the leg and whatever, what was still left 'cause there must still be some—there must still be some there today.

Anderson: Yes.

Wagner: So once you were totally back and healed and ready to go, what was your next move for your unit?

Anderson: Well, this Captain [Andrew “Ack Ack”] Haldane was a very, very excellent officer. He was well liked. Everybody respected him, and I was his runner out to the front lines most of time, or on the front lines. But the next step we went into training for the next operation.

Wagner: So at this point you haven't even done any amphibious operations yet, but you were trained for that?

Anderson: Yes

Wagner: And the next one would be an amphibious operation?

Anderson: That's right.

Wagner: Describe some of the training.

Anderson: I think that because of the time element and what was doing that there was not too much training. It was just a matter of getting issued a rifle, getting it zeroed in, and they would tell you what your job is going to be in the next operation.

Wagner: The attitude of the men from when they first reach combat now and at the end of their first major encounter, did you see any changes in the attitude of the men you were working with?

Anderson: Yes, I think that the men after combat the first time they take things a lot more serious, but as I said in the beginning, there is nothing like training for combat. The best training is in the combat itself.

Wagner: Right, right. Where was the next—now what were you training for as far as this amphibious? What was the next assault going to be?

Anderson: That was on the island of Peleliu which was on the east of the Philippine islands. It was a small island, probably five, six miles long and half a mile to a mile wide. The Japanese had ten to twelve thousand troops on that small island, and we put about fifteen thousand.

Wagner: You didn't think the island might sink?

Anderson: [Both laugh] Good thing. We went in on amphibian tractors that time. And the fire the first day was very, very extremely heavy. The Japanese fought for every inch of that island. The United States had, the Marine Corps had about fifteen hundred killed. The Japanese had over ten thousand killed on that. But the first day there was very, very heavy fighting.

Wagner: Now, if I remember correctly, now you correct me if I am wrong, but on that amphibian assault, that amphibious assault, weren't the Marines pinned down on the beaches for quite a while?

Anderson: Absolutely,

Wagner: I mean you didn't have a lot of real estate to grab on to.

Anderson: Absolutely.

Wagner: And was the island was basically—was it a volcanic type island? How was the area that you were dealing with?

Anderson: Well, down on the flats it was sandy, but up on the hills was mostly coral rock. Our troops, if somebody got wounded we'd get 'em out of there right away, and if we got somebody killed we would get them back on the beach to be buried. But the Japanese, if somebody got killed they was just laid up there in the hills, and the temperature got up to about a hundred and fifteen, a hundred and seventeen degrees each day, and the smell was extremely bad. The flyers that came in to land on the short strip there, they

said they could smell that island from about two miles out. We didn't notice it too much because we was right there.

Wagner: Living in it, yes. Now, the Japanese had time to build up their defenses?

Anderson: Absolutely. They had built up in the hills. They built the caves. They had a lot of natural caves, but they had the caves interlocking, different entrances, and they had a seventy-five millimeter canon would come out and fire a few shots, and they'd pull it back into the mountain so that we wouldn't have any place to hit them.

Wagner: Now how long did this battle take?

Anderson: The commanding general of our division said that it's gonna take two to three days. I think that we was on there and fought for six weeks. It was a very heavy fighting.
[End of Tape 1, Side A]

Wagner: This is Side 2 of Tape 1. This is Todd Wagner, the Barron County Veterans Service Officer, and I am interviewing James Anderson, US Marine Corps, World War II. And we are halfway through the battle for—

Anderson: Peleliu.

Wagner: Peleliu. Okay, Mr. Anderson, you were saying that the Japanese were dug in pretty well and that they were pretty hard to dislodge. What was some of the typical ways that you had to work your way up into the hill country from the beach into the mountainous area? How did that go?

Anderson: That was extremely, extremely hard. The show or movie that was put out by *Saving Private Ryan*, I think it is a good view of about what we had on Peleliu. In order to get up into them hills one time, I was the captain's runner, and he had to go up to look over the front lines of what we was going to move in to. We went up there, and there was two of us, myself and another gentleman that was runners with Captain Haldane. As we got up into the rough country, Captain Haldane looked up over the top of a sharp hill [Hill 140] and "bang." He was shot right square through the forehead. The Japanese were laying for anybody along there, and they killed Captain Haldane, and all of the men in our company felt extremely bad about that. The other interesting story is that we was up on the northern end of Peleliu, almost all done, and I was on a mission from Captain—that was the company commander, I was supposed to go back and bring up a couple of tanks because we was in a little jam up there. And I headed back to the rear to bring these tanks up, and as I was walkin' along I come around a

corner, and here was a Jap soldier at a distant of ten feet from me. He brought up his rifle and fired, and I could see the flame come right out of the end of the muzzle, and he missed me and I pulled up and shot and, of course, got him. So that's one time that an M1 rifle, which is a semiautomatic, come in very good. But you mentioned that in the first battle I didn't fire my rifle, but here on Peleliu I shot it a good many times. The other thing is in training they try to teach you to save your ammunition. But when you're in combat you don't try to save ammunition. You just use it up and save a few rounds towards the end.

Wagner: Now was this Japanese soldier that you encountered, did he have any papers on him? Or did you search him to take anything back to your company?

Anderson: No, when he went down I thought the best thing to do was go ahead with my mission so I did the smartest thing is I legged it out of there.

Wagner: Got out of there, okay.

Anderson: I think that the more you're in combat you learn a few things that you don't normally pick up in training. The other thing is that we was ordered—we all had a composition that we called "Composition C," but what did you call it?

Wagner: Ah, C-4.

Anderson: C-4. Now this is a putty like explosive. At that time it come in about stick form about an inch square and about ten inches long. Everybody had three, four sticks of that. What we would do with is we'd put some water and some instant coffee in a canteen cup and tear off a little bit of this composition C-4 and set it down by the canteen cup, and if you lit it with a match, "whoosh," and you had hot coffee. So that's another thing that you learned.

Wagner: Okay. The tricks of survival.

Anderson: Yes.

Wagner: How to get hot coffee in the jungle.

Anderson: [laughs] Yeah. The other thing is that when we landed like on Peleliu we was issued six K-rations. K-rations is a small, about the size of a video tape, and we was ordered six of them, were supposed to last you three days. Sometimes we'd stretch 'em to run four or five. But while you're in combat, they'd try to get you up K-rations or if

nothing else, C-Rations. C-Rations is just a can about the size of beans, that's we had to eat at that time.

Wagner: Did you, did they, the composition of the "C-Rats" or the "K-Rats," did you have anything that you really enjoyed, or is there some that you just couldn't really want to eat after a while?

Anderson: Well, you had to just tolerate it. But at the very, very end of the Peleliu battle they brought us up some 10-in-1 rations. 10-in-1 rations is, it's enough food for ten men for one meal or for one man for ten meals. And this was excellent food. We really enjoyed it. It had, oh, it had meat and beans and all the rest of it and crackers, and then it had fruit in there which we liked very much.

Wagner: Did you—in talking to other veterans, I find that some of them had grown to dislike Spam. Did you end up with a lot of Spam up in your area?

Anderson: Not too much. I think the K-Rations had some Spam in. The hash that we used in C-Rations I didn't care too much for. When we was not in combat we also got powdered eggs. The powdered eggs was very, very poor, I would say. It smelt. The powdered eggs smelt so bad that you couldn't hardly eat it. But what we would do was smother it in ketchup, and then we could eat that powdered eggs.

Wagner: You said you were coming back. You were on a mission. You encountered a Japanese soldier, and you went on to finish the mission, the carrying the message that was being sent back. Now basically we're at the end of the Battle of Peleliu, right?

Anderson: Yes.

Wagner: Okay, go ahead. You're gonna say something.

Anderson: Well, I had to go back. My mission at that time was to go back and bring up some tanks. And we brought up the tanks, and we come back where I had met this other Japanese, and he was disappeared with. He was gone. I didn't know what happened. But after about six weeks on Peleliu we finally got off of there. To add to that is that up in the hills where all of the caves were we had the F4U Corsair airplane flew by Marines. And they would come up there and drop napalm on them hills. Now that was one of the shortest bombing runs of World War II because they said it was less than 500 yards from the end of the airport to where they'd drop it. These Corsairs wouldn't even draw up their wheels. They left their wheels down, go up there and drop the napalm which is a jellied gasoline that they dropped on the hills, and they'd

swing around and be back off from that mission in less than ten minutes. Then they'd put on another container of napalm, take it over and drop it again.

Wagner: Were the Japanese—they were very difficult to dislodge?

Anderson: Absolutely.

Wagner: Did the napalm have an effect on getting them to surrender, or did they just entrench themselves further?

Anderson: I think that the napalm would burn the oxygen out of the air for 'em, and that'd kill some of them, and also burn off a certain section of the hill. I think the napalm did a lot of good.

Wagner: So, at the end of the battle your platoon, regiment, was brought back in for a rest area for a while?

Anderson: Yes. But I'd like to drop back to the fight on Cape Gloucester.

Wagner: Go ahead.

Anderson: We went in with about approximately 230 men in my company, and we come off of there with about 125. Then we got replacements to build us back up again to full strength. We went on to the island of Pelileu with about 235 men and officers. We come off from there with eighty, a total of eighty-five able bodied men. So we had lost that percentage, and then we went back to the same training area as we had before, and we got replacements to build us back up.

Wagner: Now you're talking about replacements. How was the replacement for Captain Haldane? Was he a pretty well experienced officer, or was he basically a newer lieutenant?

Anderson: He was a, had a platoon in our company that took his place. His name was First Lieutenant George Loveday. And he was a very fair man. He wasn't well liked as Captain Haldane. Captain Haldane would talk to a private just like a general. Some of the other officers treated a private very rude, but George Loveday, I think, was a good, efficient officer.

Wagner: That's good. How did the seasoned veterans in your platoon respond to the new men that were coming in, the replacements?

Anderson: A good question. I think that after a man had been through battle they tend to kind of hang together, but they did not totally ignore a new man until a man has proved his worth in combat. After all, a few times that you had, we didn't have any in the first part of the war, but towards the end of the thing, of the war, you had more psychiatry or—

Wagner: Psychiatric?

Anderson: Yeah, they turned theirself in, but not too many.

Wagner: Okay. In your rest areas when you were coming off the battle, what was a typical day?

Anderson: Oh, we didn't have, they didn't train us, because we'd been in combat. They didn't train us real mean, but we had to get ready. It was matter of getting a new rifle and sightin' it in and so forth. But they didn't pull many jokes. Once in a while, there was something done. Bob Hope came to our camp and put on a good show. Everybody enjoyed it, but I had the guard duty that night so I did not attend.

Wagner: You said that there wasn't a whole lot of joking or pranks being played. Was there a rivalry between the Marines and the Navy or the Marines and the Army as far as getting supplies or, I don't want to say, stealing things but somehow obtaining equipment that you needed? Was there anything like that happening? I mean, you see a lot of that in the movies, the old movies, you know.

Anderson: I did not, was not aware of all this. Some of the guys said that they'd go down to the Army PX [Post Exchange] and try to get some beer or get other stuff that they was not entitled to, but most of the time the guys would just relax, would be satisfied.

Wagner: How about mail?

Anderson: Well, I think towards the second time in that training camp we got a little better food. We got three meals a day. The powdered eggs weren't much better, and they got the powdered potatoes or whatever it was, but we had fairly good food.

Wagner: Were you getting mail from the home?

Anderson: Oh yes, yeah. They come through with that V-mail where it was taken a picture of it I guess here in the United States. The thing was, I got called out on is that here I was in

the hospital, and I was going overseas. I couldn't write, and I was in the hospital. I couldn't very much then, and when you're in combat for a while you don't get a chance to write. My folks wrote and said that they wrote to the commanding officer and says we're not getting the mail from me. Well, the main reason was that I wasn't capable of writing.

Wagner: Okay, so the commander let you know that he had received a letter from home.

Anderson: Yes, but I explained to him, I says I was on a ship for thirty days, and I was in combat for four or five days, and I was here in the hospital and, that's the reason I couldn't write.

Wagner: And his instructions were?

Anderson: Write [both laugh].

Wagner: Okay, Jim. Now, I am thinking that this is probably going to take you—bring us up into your third major engagement. That was what, Okinawa?

Anderson: That's correct. We left this training camp on an LST [Landing Ship Tank]. Down in the hold they had amphibian tractors that when we get up near Okinawa we was to take into the beach. We landed on Okinawa, April 1, 1945. That'd be April Fool's Day. I was on the assaulting wave, and we got all ready for a big campaign, and we got on the beach, and not a shot was fired.

Wagner: And how did the men respond to that?

Anderson: [laughs] I think that they says, "Well, we're already lived a day longer than we had figured." But at night we could see, had very nice fireworks. The Japanese would come over with the airplanes and all the ships was firing at the Japanese. I think we didn't—the first day we fell into a long line of Marines, and we just marched right down the road, and there wasn't any fighting at all.

Wagner: The fighting then was going to take place inland?

Anderson: That's right. We went across the island, and there was some Okinawans had, well, I would call them, ponies. They weren't very high, but we'd catch them ponies and put our packs on them ponies and lead them ponies down the road until we got to a camp, that we set up camp down on the middle section of Okinawa.

Wagner: Okay. Now you indicate here, and I don't want to get ahead of our questioning today(??), but you indicate that—I remember you had a Japanese flag that you showed me when I first came to work here.

Anderson: That's right.

Wagner: And soon thereafter you made an attempt to have it returned.

Anderson: That's right.

Wagner: So what's the story behind that? How did you get the flag and just take us up through the battle with that.

Anderson: Towards the end of April of the 1945 we went to the southern end of Okinawa where the fighting was. While we was down on the southern end we was getting some sniper fire from a cave down there. Somebody told us to go up there and take care of it, and a couple of us fellows, this is another reason for being up to date on everything, is that two or three of us went down there, and one guy would fire and the other ones would move up, and then they would fire at that cave while the other guys moved up, and we got up by the cave, and somebody threw a hand grenade in the cave. I was one of the first ones into that cave, and here was three, four dead Japs in that cave, and one of them had a little piece of white coming out from underneath his jacket. I pulled it out, and here was a Japanese flag with a lot of scribbling of Japanese on that flag. I stuck the flag in my pack and brought it home. They let us bring it into the United States as a souvenir. I didn't think any more about it until getting, about 1990, which would be forty, fifty, almost fifty years later. A girl was going to write a story up, and she took a picture of the flag, and she had that flag interpreted and found out the man's name that had owned the flag. And she give me the interpretation of the flag, and I in turn wrote to the Japanese Consulate in Chicago. They told me who took care of all the veterans affairs would be the welfare department in Japan. I wrote out there, and give the man's name and so forth. This all took a period of a couple of years. After so many years, I finally got a name from the Japanese in Japan. I wrote a letter to this man's son so the Japanese that owned the flag—I wrote to his son in Japan. Pretty soon the letter came back, and he stated that his father had been in Manchuria in the Japanese Army. He come back to Japan and then in turn went to Okinawa. And he had been married, and had two boys and a girl, and this was the youngest boy that I was in contact with. And after a few years he wrote to me, and he asked for the flag back. And I thought it doesn't mean that much to me, so I just up and mailed it to him, and he wrote me back a letter, and he said that one day he come home from work, and here was a package from the United States on his house. He said that he approached

that package most reverently. That's the way he put it. Because he says after all, that was the flag that his father had owned. And he thanked me very, very much for that flag. His mother, or the man's wife had died just several months before so she missed seeing the flag. And he said that his brother is handicapped, but he said I'll show him the flag. So I got a thank-you back.

Wagner: That must have made you feel, I mean that must have brought some kind of closure for you, being able to do something like this—

Anderson: Oh, yes, I think—

Wagner: For the son of an enemy.

Anderson: Yeah, I'm glad I sent it, now.

Wagner: That's good. What about the—we took a sidetrack here from the Battle for Okinawa. What were some of the other issues you encountered or some of the other adventures you might have had there?

Anderson: On Okinawa we were sent to the southern end towards the end of April. On Okinawa, I think it refers back to similar to World War I battles. The Japanese had lots of heavy artillery. We got lots of artillery fired at us. One time it rained a lot on Okinawa, and there was lots of mud, and we had dug foxholes, and I was in a foxhole, and a large caliber artillery shell went off quite close, but it went down so deep in the mud, it just shot all of the mud up in the air. It didn't hurt anybody. And down there, because of the mud and the water and everything they couldn't get any food up to us on the front lines. We usually had K-rations if possible, but they couldn't get anything up to us. But we did not suffer too much. We would go off to the local people's gardens and dig up sweet potatoes. They had sweet potatoes that were very good. We—they had pigs, and they had chickens, and if it was possible, we'd shoot a pig and eat it. Sometimes we didn't get food for five, six days, but we never suffered.

Wagner: So life was about as good as it could get, considering where you were?

Anderson: Yes. Absolutely.

Wagner: How long were you on Okinawa?

Anderson: I think April first, and the war was right on Okinawa till after the war was declared over in August. We fought there until I 'spose about August.

Wagner: Now Okinawa, that's where Mount Suribachi is?

Anderson: No.

Wagner: No, where is that at?

Anderson: Mount Suribachi is on—

Wagner: Iwo Jima.

Anderson: Iwo Jima.

Wagner: Okay, thank you for correcting me [Anderson laughs]. I get my facts mixed up sometimes. After Okinawa, what happened? Where did you end up?

Anderson: Well the war was over. Japan surrendered in August. I seen the plane fly over to land on—the pure white Japanese plane come in to start to arrange the proceedings for the surrender. I would guess that we was on there after the war was over about six weeks. And then they shipped my whole unit to China. On our way over to China we was on a Landing Ship Tank [LST] again, and the typhoon hit. And it was very, very, very bad weather at that time. The ship pitched up and down and rolled somethin' terrible. We didn't get anything but sandwiches. They give us sandwiches to eat because the cooks couldn't make anything. And we landed in Taku, China at that time. That's down on the coast.

Wagner: Is that southern China?

Anderson: That's northern China.

Wagner: Northern China, okay.

Anderson: And I was one of the first trains from the coast up through Tianjin, China, and we went into the capital of Peping, China. At that time it had been known as Peking. It was known as Peping, and today it's known as Beijing. It's all the same town.

Wagner: Same town, just different people in control.

Anderson: Yes.

Wagner: And how did the Chinese people react to the US Marines coming in?

Anderson: “Ding Hao.” Everywhere we went, they would holler at us, “Ding Hao.” We marched for, after we got off of the ship, we had to march up to the train station, and hundreds and hundreds of people was crowding the streets, "Ding Hao." I'm not too sure, but I think that “Ding Hao” means, very good.

Wagner: Good luck? Very good?

Anderson: Yeah, very good. But as we marched up to go to the train station, the Japanese [**End of Tape 1, SideB**]

Wagner: This is Tape 2, Side 1. This is Todd Wagner. I'm interviewing James Anderson, United States Marine Corps, World War II. We have just entered China, and we were talking about the Japanese or the Chinese people calling out to the Marines as they were marching, “Ding Hao,” meaning, “Good luck,” “Glad to see you.” [inaudible] very happy to be relieved of the Japanese. And you were saying that you were in Peping at the time?

Anderson: No, we had, the town on the coast was Taku, I think. T-A-K-O or something like that. Anyhow, the Japanese was still in control of that country so they were very fussy who was going to go up to the capital, and we was marching from the harbor to the train station, but the people were crowding in there so bad that I can't remember for sure, if it was the Japanese or the Chinese policemen was beating the crowd back with great big sticks. And they would take and beat those people right across their face and right on their heads and everything else to make ‘em keep back from getting up too close. But I thought that was terrible cruel to hit a woman right across the face to drive ‘em back. We got up to the train station, and here it was, one of them old dilapidated trains like we used to use back in the 1800s here.

Wagner: An old steam engine?

Anderson: [laughs] I s'pose it was. But we was loaded aboard that and up in the front they put machine guns and so forth because they didn't know what they was going to run into from the Japanese. We went up on the train to Tianjin, that was the next larger city. And then it was quite a ways farther up to Peping, which is by Beijing today. We was very impressed with the country. They all had, the peasants there had their own land, but when we come into Beijing here they had great big walls where they was keeping the people out of different sections of the city. We had to march from the train station, and we was billeted where the company was set in the British legation. That's where

years ago the British had their master. And that was in turn surrounded with just a high wall, and then they could control very good. They'd put a guard on the main gate, and that's where you'd be [??].

Wagner: So, what was your impression of China? Once you were there for a while and things began to settle into a routine, what was your overall impression?

Anderson: I enjoyed China very, very much. When we got to China they made me acting property sergeant. I tried to get whatever equipment the men needed. And they give me two young fellows from Texas to assist me. And of course one man could do all the work of everything there, and we had time. We could leave the compound that we was in at any time. As you left your compound and went on the outside right here by the main gate, here was rickshaw men, was all there wanting to give you a ride. And they'd keep hollering at you that they'd give you a ride very reasonable, and at that time, US money changed in value, and according to the Chinese, nationalist money each day, it'd be varied. I think when we got there, one American dollar was worth pretty close to twelve hundred nationalist dollars. And these rickshaw men would work for practically a nickel, would haul you anywhere you wanted to go.

Wagner: That's interesting. What about some of the customs? How did you find the relating to the people?

Anderson: The practically two different sections of the people—first of all there was the intellectual people. Some of them was very up-to-date and kept up to things and treated everybody in a good manner, and some of them would even speak English. The average coolie or Chinese person was treated very, very poorly. They wouldn't think nothing of beating 'em for little or nothing.

Wagner: So they were treated much like an animal?

Anderson: That's right. We had to go, we had to furnish guard duty out to the main airfield. They called it the North Airfield, and we'd would have to take a truck from our compound to go out to the airfield. And it wouldn't be nothing unusual if you went out there in the morning as you drove down the highway that you could see may maybe two, three, four dead people laying in the gutters, that they had died during the night. I don't know who, somebody throwed them out there. So they was treated very, very poorly. At that time, the nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek was fighting the Communists.

Wagner: Mao Tse-tung [now Zedong]?

Anderson: Mao Tse-tung, yes. And out in the countryside I think the Communists was kind of controlling, but the United States was siding with Mao Tse-tung there and also his wife. I can't remember her name.

Wagner: The United States was siding with the Nationalists.

Anderson: Yeah.

Wagner: With Chaing Kai-shek.

Anderson: Yeah. And one day, it was in October of 1945, we had a large thing on the parade grounds there in Peping. And all the military men was out there, all of our Marine Corps ones, and the general was there, and that Chaing-kai Shek was there too. But I was awarded the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart which I had gotten from before. I was awarded them in China at that time.

Wagner: And your Bronze Star?

Anderson: Well, the Bronze Star, I was awarded that for the fighting on Okinawa. It happened to be that we got into a pretty tough squeeze up there, and my company commander sent me to the rear. We was getting shelled by our own artillery, and they sent me to the rear to try to get that artillery stopped at night. Normally in the Pacific nobody moved at night except the Japanese, but I did go back there at that time, and I managed to get our own artillery stopped. That's the funny part. I guess in Europe they fought at night, but in the Pacific everybody stayed, all of our men stayed in the hole, and if anybody was moving around it was the Japanese.

Wagner: The US GI, and the GI to be infantrymen, Marine, Army, how did you feel about adapting to the Japanese? They had the reputation of being jungle fighters, being little people, and yet I know the [Japanese] Imperial Marines were noted to be over six foot. How did you feel coming up against an enemy that had a reputation for being so victorious throughout all the Pacific, and yet you didn't have a whole lot of jungle training?

Anderson: Well, I think that they—we knew that the Japanese was very treacherous. Because they'd try to surrender, and then when they surrendered they'd have a hand grenade under their armpits. And life didn't mean too much for them, but we would try to do our very best to kill 'em. They talk about theses banzai charges of the Japanese. I was in three major campaigns, and I never, ever seen a banzai charge. I don't know if it is

overblown or what, but maybe they did do some of it with some other campaigns. But, as far as fighting against the Japanese, we didn't have any [laughs] objection to that.

Wagner: Okay. The war comes to an end. You're in China. You're getting ready to come back home. How was the trip back home? What was it like?

Anderson: Well, first of all is that a little bit before I came home is that I could go out on leave practically anytime I wanted to. We would go out to a nightclub. You could—they'd bring you in four, five ducks. And you would pick out a duck that you wanted to, and maybe you could have a duck dinner for twenty five cents, very reasonable. They also would have some liquor there, but we was warned time and time again that to be very careful because some of their liquor they open up a bottle of liquor and use it up, and then they pour something else into that bottle, and you have to be careful what you drink. But, all in all, I enjoyed China very much. They had nightclubs were you would go and buy a strip of dance tickets for fifty cents, and you could go and dance with those girls, and they weren't prostitutes or anything. They just enjoyed getting the tickets from you for dancing with you. Incidentally, the musicians that played in the bands, the bands that played there. We called 'em White Russians. They were white people, civilians. I don't know what they were. We called 'em White Russians. But they played all tunes of the 1920's and the 1930', and they played jazz numbers, and so forth, and it was very good. So I enjoyed it there. In order to come back to the United States to be discharged we went by points.

Wagner: Could you explain the points system?

Anderson: Well, you got so many points for each medal like the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart. You got so many points for that. You got so many points for every battle that you was in. You got so many points for each month that you was overseas. And you added up all of these points, and the first guys to come home was eighty-five points. And I think I missed out on that first shipment 'cause I had eighty-four. And the next shipment from China they must have dropped it to about eighty points, and I was eligible to come home, but I went down to see our company commander, and I says, "Well, I don't know if I should go or not." I says, "I enjoy it very much here." He says, "Andy," it's what he called me, Andy. He says, "Andy, you've been over here so long, and you haven't seen your relations for so long," he says, "You gotta go home." [laughs]

Wagner: Okay, so you get home. You landed, what, San Diego, San Francisco?

Anderson: They put us aboard a ship. Well, back up a little bit. What we was doing there in North China, we was supposed to get the Japanese that were in charge and take away their weapons and ship them Japanese back to Japan. I imagine that most of them were very happy to go. Some of them Japanese that was out in the country, I remember coming in there, and they had wood burning trucks they was riding on into the main town. And I imagined they was willing to go home. But the next thing we did, our authorities allowed us to go into a Japanese armory, and they let the guys that had been overseas the longest to go in first and pick out a souvenir to take home. A lot of the guys went in and picked out sabers. When I went in I picked out a brand spanking new, still in grease, Japanese pistol, a Nambu. And I brought that home in a used holster, but a brand new pistol. And when I got back to the United States I investigated where that pistol was built, and it was, had been built in Japan in 1938. And I kept it for quite a few years, and I gave it now to my grandson in Wyoming. We come back on a ship that come straight through to San Diego, and when we got into San Diego we wasn't there a day, and they put us on a troopship. I'm sorry, a troop train, to go to Great Lakes Naval Station in Chicago. And this troop train was all returned veterans, and of course there was quite a lot of celebrating coming on the troop train. They'd jump off the troop train ahead of us, they'd jump off that, and they'd run over and pick up a few bottles of whisky and then jump back on the next troop train [laughs].

Wagner: Okay, so you were feeling no pain when you came home?

Anderson: I didn't touch [Wagner laughs] too much, but some of there were.

Wagner: I would assume there was a lot of card games going on?

Anderson: Yes.

Wagner: Yes, okay. I note here that you said that your homecoming was very low key, a lot of veterans, but once you arrived home, once you got back to Barron County, Dallas, Wisconsin, what was it? I mean, now you're discharged. You were discharged at this point, weren't you?

Anderson: I was discharged in Great Lakes, Chicago. They give us money at that time on our discharge. They give us one flat fee. I can't remember. It seems to think me [??] it hit forty, fifty dollars. And then they give you train fare from Chicago to Eau Claire, and my folks picked me up in Eau Claire. But you have to remember that there was hundreds and hundreds of veterans coming home so this was nothing unusual. And all I had to think about was how am I going to make a living. I really didn't want to farm

so I went out and looked around. I did get training as a mechanic, and I got that training under the GI Bill of Rights. They paid the fellow that I was working for, they paid him some amount, and I was paid to go up to the Rice Lake Vocational School and learn how to weld, and that was taken care of by the GI Bill.

Wagner: So basically your worries about finding a job, finding a car, getting back on your feet, did you find adjusting to being home and no longer being in the Marines, did you find there was an adjustment issue or not being in combat, did you find that it was difficult to adjust to civilian life?

Anderson: No, I don't think so. It was kind of accepted that you're gonna get back into civilian life and it wouldn't be happening anymore.

Wagner: Did you find, what did you find that was different about you when you came back? What did you notice, or what did your family notice was different about Andy?

Anderson: Well, I don't know if my family knew anything more, but I think your outlook on life changed quite a lot. To me, I figured after being in combat and getting shelled so heavy and everything else, every day after that I figured that's a bonus of mine that I can live with. So, I always thought that [laughs] I have been very fortunate.

Wagner: So every day after Okinawa was a blessing?

Anderson: That's right, absolutely. That's the way.

Wagner: It was a new life every day. Wake up and—

Anderson: That's right.

Wagner: Be thankful. Okay. You indicate here that you went on for your training utilizing the GI Bill. You learned to weld, learned auto mechanics, and then you went into the post office?

Anderson: That's right.

Wagner: And how long did you stay in the post office?

Anderson: Let's see, I think I was in there altogether around twenty years.

Wagner: So you retired out of the post office then?

Anderson: Ah, the other thing is reunions. My company, which at times was 235 men in full strength, but they had reunions, but it was different parts of the country. When it was fairly close around I'd take 'em in, but I met some very, very, very good friends, and we'd talk about old times. These things they said the way the reunions went, that wasn't, we never had that carry on and everybody get drunk. That wasn't it, but later years I don't get so anxious to go.

Wagner: Okay. You note here that you tried to go to those that were closest.

Anderson: That's right.

Wagner: But said during the later years it just got too expensive.

Anderson: That's right.

Wagner: And I can imagine that, you know. Looking back, how do you feel about your military and war experiences? You said that you met a lot of nice people. You got a chance to travel, see things that you never would have seen being in China, being in the South Pacific. What were some of the things that really stand out as to your military experience that you reflect back on today?

Anderson: Well, number one, I think is like we mentioned before is the people that I have met. They're very fine people in every way imaginable. I know what combat is on the front lines, so that's another thing. But I guess most generally we take—have to accept it as it is.

Wagner: Okay. Is there anything else you want to say as we close off for the memoir here, for the record if you will?

Anderson: No, I think you covered everything very good. I know Todd from quite a few years back, and he's a very fine gentleman, and I think you did a good job, Todd [laughs].

Wagner: Thank you, thank you. This brings to a close the interview with Sergeant—

Anderson: Nope, I only got corporal.

Wagner: You made corporal? [Anderson laughs] Okay, I misread the discharge here. Okay, there you go Jim, correcting me again. As we bring to a close the interview with James Anderson, Marine Corps corporal. Once a Marine, always a Marine.

Anderson: Yeah.

Wagner: And a veteran of World War II. I'd like to recite according to his discharge: That Corporal Anderson participated in action against the enemy at New Guinea, 2 December '43 to 24 December '43, Cape Gloucester, New Britain, 1 January '44 to 5 January '44, Peleliu on Palau Island, 15 September '44 to 14 October '44. Okinawa, Ryukyu Islands, 1 April '45 - 21 June '45, and he had service in China. He received the Good Conduct Medal, a Purple Heart, a Bronze Star, Victory Medal and things of this nature, the standard medals for World War II. And so stands the record of Corporal James Anderson, a true veteran and a friend. Thank you, Jim.

Anderson: [laughs] Okay, you're welcome.

[End of Interview]