

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
John B. Davis
United States Marine Corps, World War II

2004

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Davis, John B., (1922-), Oral History Interview, 2004

User copy : 1 sound cassette (ca. 50 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master copy : 1 sound cassette (ca. 50 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

John B. Davis, a Washburn, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War II service in the Marine Corps and his later stateside service in the Navy as a reserve officer during the Korean War. He tells that he hitchhiked to Madison, got a job at Wisconsin General Hospital, and attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison in pre-med. He relates his activities upon hearing about the attack on Pearl Harbor. He says that he and his five roommates were eager to enlist, thought the war would be won quickly, and tells why he chose the Marines. Basic and radio training was at San Diego Recruit Depot (California) and he was assigned to the 9th Marine Regiment, 3rd Battalion; the forming unit of the 3rd Marine Division. Additional radio training was at Camp Pendleton and Davis characterizes his training there as intense. He says that many of the radiomen viewed their antennas as prime targets and some bent them. Shipped to New Zealand, his unit trained there until the rest of the 3rd Marine Division arrived. He describes the Division's first campaign at Bougainville as a "sorry mess" including strong surf, landing craft turned sideways and filled with sand, being in a swamp and sleeping in trees, and being cut off. He tells of bombing by the Japanese and having empty wooden gasoline tanks dropped when they ran out of bombs. He explains waiting on Guadalcanal for orders and hearing Tokyo Rose reveal their next move to New Ireland, which was to have been secret. He describes nine hundred men on LSTs, sitting atop their bombs and waiting for six weeks to see if the Marines were able to hold Saipan before proceeding to Guam. Davis tells of several buddies killed during the invasion of Guam and says they took thirty days to advance thirty miles and then had trouble getting back to where they had originally landed as the Japanese had filled in behind them. In November of 1944, his unit voted for Van Camp (of Van Camp Beans) for president who won ninety-two percent of the vote. Davis and eleven other fellows were pulled and sent to the States on a liberty ship that took fifty-four days to return. There, he realized they were to be trained as replacement officers. He briefly relates his role in getting thirty men from Quantico together for the removal of President Roosevelt's body to Hyde Park, New York. After his promotion to lieutenant at Quantico, Davis tells that he was kept at Camp LeJeune as it was discovered he was the sole surviving son in his family. At LeJeune, he taught personal camouflage in the Troop Officers Training Battalion for the V-12s and V-6s that came out of college as officers. He tells of receiving letters from his buddies, hearing of the many lost at Iwo Jima, and his desire to be back with his unit. Davis relates being called up in the Reserves to go to Korea during his first year of medical school at the UW and his feeling that his time would be better spent finishing medical school. He wrote Senator Joseph McCarthy, was encouraged to enlist in the Navy as hospital personnel, and thus received a Marine Corps discharge that kept him out of the Korean War.

Davis describes his attachment to the men of his Marine unit and tells of feeling “famous” while visiting the yet-to-be completed World War II Memorial. Davis speaks of his use of the GI Bill to complete his medical degree and his later career as a doctor and his volunteer work.

Biographical Sketch:

John B. Davis (b. 1922) describes his combat experiences in the Pacific Theater as a Marine during World War II. After the war, Davis became a reserve officer in the Navy and graduated from medical school at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He practiced medicine in Markesan, Wisconsin before moving to Madison where he served as Radiology Department Chair at Dean Clinic, a position he held for eighteen years. Davis also volunteered on medical missions throughout the world for the Methodist Church and spoke on drug abuse at various Native American reservations.

Interviewed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2004.
Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2004.
Transcript edited by Brooke E. Perry Hoesli, 2008

Interview Transcript

Driscoll: Okay, this is John Driscoll, and today is July 12, 2004, and I am a volunteer with the Wisconsin Veterans Museum. And this is an oral history interview with John Davis, a veteran of World War II, in the United States Marine Corps. And John, good afternoon, and thanks a lot for agreeing to the interview.

Davis: My pleasure.

Driscoll: Can we start off at the very beginning. Where and when were you born?

Davis: I was born on January 6, 1922, in Washburn, Wisconsin. And my father was a minister, a Methodist minister, so we moved a lot. I was in many places, Tomah, Cuba City, Onalaska, Stanley, New Richmond, finally ending up in Grant County where we stayed until I finished high school

Driscoll: What high school?

Davis: The high school, Livingston High School.

Driscoll: Okay.

Davis: In Livingston, Wisconsin. And then, and I graduated from there and then hitch-hiked up to Madison and got a job working in the hospital, Wisconsin General Hospital at that time. And making ice cream, and working pots and pans. Anything to make a few dollars, because my father had little or no money to send me to school. So I worked my way through a year and a half of school before December 7 came along. And that changed my life.

Driscoll: Okay. Do you remember what you were doing on December 7?

Davis: I was on my way over to the hospital, 7 o'clock in the morning. To send some ice cream up to the floors. Because it was time for the nurses to get off in the morning, the night nurses, and they liked ice cream, and I made a lot of it. And I was on my way over to the hospital, just down the block. It was about two and a half blocks down there. To serve the ice cream. I bought a newspaper from a kid on the street. And it had WAR on it. And we were in a war. I was living with five other fellows in a flat on Brook Street, North Brook Street. And we all got together that afternoon, Sunday afternoon, we got together and we all decided we'd go and enlist Monday morning. Which we promptly did, except two boys were not allowed to go. Their parents said absolutely not. My parents said I had to finish the semester, and so Johnny Wilkins and Vivian Wilkins, his brother, they were told also that they had to finish the semester at school. Just don't run off

right now. We wanted to go right then. I actually had two teeth pulled because they were a little sore. They weren't bad, but they were a little sore. I didn't want to miss going in. We wanted to go to that war. And we all were very poorly informed as to the Japanese. We thought we would be over there for a little while, and then come home. Little realizing it would be such a long journey up the Solomon Islands, and up the Mariana Islands, and the Gilbert Islands, until we finally reached Iwo Jima. The other boys went in with me, three other boys went in with me. And they were separated after boot camp. We were settled at that time out at the parade grounds. They had tents out there because we were arriving thousands at a time every day.

Driscoll: This was at San Diego?

Davis: At San Diego.

Driscoll: Let me back up just a minute. Why the Marine Corps?

Davis: What?

Driscoll: Why the Marine Corps?

Davis: Ah, I've been asked that before.

Driscoll: So have I.

Davis: Yes. I had a brother that was in the Air Corps and he was killed, just a year before the war. He was in Kelly Field. He had his wings. And he was a lieutenant in the Air Corps, and at that time they called it the Air Corps. The Air Force, it was not the Air Force at that time. They called it the Air Corps. So I didn't want to do it to my parents. I was the only boy remaining in our family. We had had three boys previously. Two of them had died. And I didn't care for the sailor's uniform.

Driscoll: Okay.

Davis: I just didn't care for it, and I didn't want to be in the Army, because they were draftees. The only thing that was left was a Marine, and I could go in there as a volunteer. And I wanted to volunteer. I don't know why. Just volunteer. So I went in there February 9th, 1942. And went to San Diego Recruit Depot, and we went through boot camp there. And I stayed afterwards to go to radio school. And I finished radio school, and we were all split up, once again, into units. And we were the forming unit for the 3rd Marine Division. We were in the 9th Marine Regiment, in the 3rd Battalion. And that was the first unit formed in the 3rd Marine Division. We marched from San Diego, Elliot Field, they called it. Camp

Elliot. We marched from there and opened up Pendleton, Camp Pendleton, which was at Oceanside. And we marched up there with all of our gear and everything. And by the time we got up there, the 21st Marines, which had formed on the East Coast, at Parris Island, joined us. And then we had the 9th Marines, in the 3rd Division, and we had the 21st Marine Regiment, and later the 3rd Regiment joined us. And then they made the three regiments in the division, the 3rd Division. So we were in there first. And our commander at that time was Colonel Lemuel B. Shepherd.

Driscoll: Oh, yes. I knew him. He was commandant when I was in the Marine Corps.

Davis: And he was eventually the commandant, that's right. And he signed my Pfc. papers. And I rescued his dog at one of our problems. We used to call them problems. They were campaigns. Real short campaigns. I rescued his dog, so I was kind of a pet for a little while. Along with the dog, I guess. The dog fell off the jeep when they were lowering it from the landing craft, so I dove in and saved the dog. But, anyhow, that was, we trained there at Camp Pendleton, and it was very, very intensive training. We called it snooper-drooper school. I guess they called it something else now, but it was very intense training. We would be farmed out, as radiomen, we would be farmed out to platoons, and different companies within the battalion. And maintain communications. We were detached at that time, so sometimes we were with I Company, sometimes with K Company, and sometimes with M Company. And the thing that we hated was that antenna, that stuck up in the air.

Driscoll: Yea. Yea.

Davis: And we were a prime target.

Driscoll: Yea.

Davis: And we recognized that. We recognized that early on. And some of the boys even bent the antennas. The radio equipment was not good. And it was very poor at that time. We shipped out from out of San Diego. We marched again down to Camp Pendleton, a hundred miles, maybe. And then we went to San Diego. And then we went to New Zealand.

Driscoll: Okay.

Davis: Well, we were all divided up into small units in New Zealand and the New Zealanders was all extremely happy to see us because at that time the Japanese had gone as far as Rabaul, which was just above, just above Australia, very close. And they could have gone even further. Whether we stopped them from going

there just by our presence - we were not in combat at that time - our presence or not, but they stopped at that point. And we trained in New Zealand for almost four or five months. And we formed up until we were a complete division. The 3rd Division came in from, or our 3rd Regiment, came in from Samoa.

Driscoll: Okay.

Davis: And then we were complete. And we were ready for combat after about three or four months. And on November 1, we had our first combat. We went in and landed at Empress Augusta Bay, November 1, 1943. At Bougainville.

Driscoll: Okay.

Davis: And Bougainville was not a campaign to take an island. I should back up and say that we spent about four months, three months, at Guadalcanal, finishing up the completion of Guadalcanal. And we trained there, and we jumped off from there, and made our landing, our first campaign, in Bougainville. And that was a sorry mess, is exactly what it was. Because the surf was so strong that it turned all of our landing craft sideways, filled them up with sand, and we were lost. We were completely cut off from the Navy and from anything else. And on top of that, one hundred miles in, we went into a swamp, and we had to sleep the first night we were there, we had to sleep up in trees. And so it was a pretty miserable affair. We knew we were trapped there. We knew we couldn't get equipment. We couldn't get water. We couldn't get ammunition. We couldn't get anything. And Bougainville was a pretty tough campaign because it was, well, we only went in about twenty-five miles. And formed a perimeter so that they could set up an airstrip there, and from there they could bomb Rabaul and so on. "Pappy" Boyington's outfit was there.

Driscoll: Oh, okay, sure.

Davis: And we could see them coming over, the Black Cat Squadron, could see them coming. They called them not the Black Cat Squadron. It was different.

Driscoll: Black Sheep.

Davis: Black Sheep. I think that is the term. Black Sheep. And they would come over, and they were still bombing us. They would come down from the, an air base north of us on Bougainville. It was never really secured well, although the Raiders had gone in several times to try to destroy it, but they still bombed us from there. So we got into some bombing. It was an interesting experience. They would also, by the time they got down to us, they would drop off their wooden tanks that they had on their aircraft, and they sounded just like bombs coming down. They would

whistle.

Driscoll: Wooden gasoline tanks?

Davis: The empty wooden gasoline tanks. And that was a kind of a scary affair. But we survived that. And by Thanksgiving we were supposed to be relieved. We did not get relieved until January 1. By the time we got back to Guadalcanal, all our Christmas presents were rotted and gone, and so we had to kind of start all over again. But the SeaBees came in and they built platforms off the ground, so that we were off the ground at Guadalcanal. They liked us, and we liked them.

Driscoll: Yea. Oh, yea.

Davis: So we had a pretty good time there, relaxing and so on. We lost a few fellows there. Not a great deal in our group, particularly, but there were some losses, and we brought in some new men. So we kind of started out with a new group.

Driscoll: Let me ask a question. What was Guadalcanal like, terrain? Swamp? Mountain? What was it?

Davis: Yea. It had a ridge of mountains. It was about seventy-five miles long and about forty miles wide, and they only took enough land to make Henderson Field. And in securing that, that was also a naval base. That and across the peninsula, across the water was Tulagi, and that was another naval base that they had. So you, that was called Iron Bottom Bay.

Driscoll: Yea. I've read that.

Davis: Yea. And that was, we didn't get in on the fighting on that. But we did have some problems in securing enough land so that almost 15,000 men, eventually, landed there. Because it became the base to jump off from. We were scheduled to go to New Ireland at that time. And we heard very plainly, we always listened to that Japanese lady. Tokyo...?

Driscoll: Rose?

Davis: Tokyo Rose. We always listened to her, and she said that the Marines had been slated to go to New Ireland. It was supposed to be a secret. And we didn't even know. "Oh, is that right?" And then she says that we would receive the same reception that the Marines had received at Tarawa, in the Gilberts. And they cancelled that, and what they did is put PT boats around New Ireland, and they never did invade it. They just secured it against their supplying. And I don't know how many Japs were left on New Ireland. But they couldn't get off, and they

couldn't fight. But, anyhow, we finally were in, we left, that was in January. About June, we were there almost a year, so then in '44, in '44, in June, we trained very hard with our recruits, our new recruits and so on. We trained very hard making many, many landings down through the Solomons, islands that were secured and so, in training. Then we took off for the Marianas, and we were told after we got up there - we thought we were going to Bonin Island. But we didn't, we went to the Marianas. And the 2nd Division was to land at Saipan. And Tinian. And we were to land on Guam. While we were to land just six days later, we didn't land on Guam for another month. And we stayed on these LSTs, nine hundred men on an LST. You couldn't go below decks, you know. The decks were all covered with water that we were to take in to Guam, because we weren't sure of the quality of the water. And our holds were holding shells for cruisers.

Driscoll: Oh, okay.

Davis: So we were sitting on a bombshell. And we were on that thing for almost six weeks. Because Saipan was in doubt. About two or three weeks. It was in doubt as to whether they could hold that island. They had some problems with surf and with supplies, and there were other things, too. So we landed on Guam, and we lost quite a few in our particular group. We lost quite a few boys. I lost W. A. Smith, William A. Smith. We called him "W. A." We lost him. He and I were carrying a coil of wire and we were advancing, and he was shot in the head. And then Pete Petosky came up to take his roll of wire so we could carry it up to the individuals up forward, and he was shot in the stomach. So I was pretty lucky to have gotten to that first ridge. Just individually. But we lost several boys right there. And from then on, it was a matter of just a slow, methodical sweep down the island, and it took thirty days to go thirty miles. So we went about a mile a day.

Driscoll: Wow.

Davis: And the number of Japs who were killed on the way down was estimated at about eight thousand. But they could hide. And they dug holes. And when we got all of our recruits, and we had got all of our recruits fill-ins, at the end of the island, we were to have, they called, a problem in going back up, the campaign. We called them problems. To go back up the island to the other end, where we had originally landed. And at that time we killed about twelve thousand Japanese.

Driscoll: Sneak in behind you?

Davis: There were many more behind us than were in front of us. So it was, you were never safe. You'd get up in the morning and you really would never know which direction you were supposed to go. Were you supposed to go forward? But we did

go forward. There was an Army unit there, too, but they had a lot of heavy equipment. And they carried too much heavy equipment. We continually would move ahead of them and then you have to come to the break between the Marines and them. That bothered us a little bit, but those things happen. We came back down, and we settled finally at Talofof Bay. At Guam. And settled down there, and we were fired on, occasionally. But it wasn't too bad, wasn't too bad at all. I remember there were twin boys that were in I Company, I believe. I'm not sure. I Company or K Company. One of the boys, one of the twins was killed. He was in his foxhole. We all were in foxholes. All the time. And that bothered us a great deal, and we wondered why they would allow something like that to happen. And we had many theories about that. That is about the time that the presidential elections in '44 were going on.

Driscoll: Okay.

Davis: November, '44. And we had a write in vote for Van Camp. Now, most people say, who in the hell is Van Camp. It was Van Camp beans! We had a write in vote, and he won 92 percent of the vote and the rest was Franklin Delano Roosevelt got, but Van Camp was elected president by our group, at least. We had a write in vote, and we had posters and everything else up. But then, at that time, I was there about a month or a month and a half. And at that time, they decided to send some of us back. They figured we'd had enough. And they decided to send us back, and we didn't know why. There is one fellow that comes to our reunion, John, he was sent back at the same time. But twelve of us were pulled out of our company and put on a ship, and sent back to the States. And that took fifty-four days, because we were on a Liberty ship that was supposed to be repaired. We might say we limped all the way from Guam to Mare Island.

Driscoll: Yea. Okay. Time of a Liberty ship.

Davis: And that was good duty for us, because nobody was shooting at us. We moved slow and easy. And that was the end of my combat tour. I got back to the United States and they gave us all kinds of tests. There were twelve of us. And they gave us all kinds of tests, and sent three of us to Quantico, for platoon commander school. And then I suddenly realized in some of the statistics where the platoon commanders suffered about 150 percent casualties. And we were saying, considering us as officer material, I guess. Anyhow, I went to Quantico and became a lieutenant, and then I went down to Camp LeJeune, and then they were going to ship us back. And then it was realized, in my brochure, somehow, the chaplain called me one day, and he said, "Are you John Davis?" And I said, "Yea." And he said, "Are you the sole surviving son?" And I said, "Yea." And he said, "We are going to keep you here at Camp LeJeune." And I stayed there as a teacher in personal camouflage, and what they called Troop Officers Training

Battalion. This is training the V-12s and the V-6's that came out of college, got the commission, but didn't know anything else. Well, we were considered, there was one fellow kind of followed me, and we were considered good teachers. So we taught that for a long time. And so I got a commission. And about that time, about the time I got the commission, I was getting letters from the guys, my brothers, in Iwo Jima.

Driscoll: Oh, boy.

Davis: And we lost a lot of them. We lost a lot of the boys there. And I was feeling very badly, almost as if I had missed that. I wanted to go back to my outfit. Well, it was in Camp Paradise, at Camp LeJeune, when they dropped the bomb. And that ended the war for them. But that didn't end it for me. Because I came back, and I bought a restaurant, and ran that for a year, and decided that wasn't mine. And I bought a plumbing and heating company in Savannah, Illinois. And we were doing pretty well, except I didn't like what I was doing. And I'd had a year in pre-med. And I decided to go back to school again. So I came up here to Wisconsin. First thing I got was orders to go back to the service. I was in the Reserve. Orders to go back into the service in ninety days, to go to Korea. Well, I was already in med school, the first year of med school.

Driscoll: Yea. Yea.

Davis: Kind of foolish. I mean, in three years, I'd be an M. D.

Driscoll: Yea. Yea.

Davis: And they were pulling kids out of, and sending them through, and they wouldn't get them for nine years. You know. So, I did write. I wrote to Senator McCarthy, and Senator, something, and said, I really didn't think I wanted to go back in. And they didn't think so either, because I got a letter from Forrestal, the Secretary of the Navy. Once I had enlisted in the Navy, as hospital personnel, they would give me a discharge from the Marines. So I jumped at that.

Driscoll: Okay.

Davis: And I kept that until after I finished med school. So here I had a commission, and it was what they called an organizational commission originally, from the 9th Marines. And then I had to go back to Great Lakes, and they de-commissioned me on that score. And I ended with, probably the only one with three honorable discharges from one war.

Driscoll: Okay.

- Davis: One was a platoon sergeant. One was a first lieutenant. And the other was an ensign. Because I was in the Navy, then. And then I stayed in. And I have the three discharges. And I used to hang them up above the toilet. I don't know, I did that because it was kind of a joke. Nobody had three discharges, but I got three discharges. Three honorable discharges. But that was my career.
- Driscoll: I couldn't help noticing the Mamaluke sword up there.
- Davis: Oh, that is another thing I did. When Franklin Delano Roosevelt died, I had just graduated at Quantico.
- Driscoll: Okay.
- Davis: And they wanted a guard, not an honor guard. They usually take individuals who have honors, you know. Who have medals and so on. But they told me to get thirty men together and, from the school there. And I was in charge of their, of taking Franklin Delano Roosevelt up to, on the train, to Hyde Park, New York.
- Driscoll: Oh, okay.
- Davis: So they gave me a uniform, blues, dress blues. And a sword. And a Sam Brown belt. And when we finished, we got up there, I said, "Can I keep the sword?" I didn't want the uniform. So I says, "Can I keep the sword." And it's a, that is a regular issue officer's sword. So I had two stars on my campaign ribbons, and several close calls. A few other mementoes. But that is about the end of my...
- Driscoll: What does a twenty-year-old kid think going into action, half a world away from home?
- Davis: Well, how does he...?
- Driscoll: What does he think?
- Davis: Oh, I missed home.
- Driscoll: No, I mean, what did you think, going into action?
- Davis: Oh. Well, I wrote. I don't know where that is. I wrote a long letter, when I went into Guam. I had plenty of time to write it. We were on that LST. I wrote a long letter saying I hoped I didn't lose any of my friends. We were an extremely close...have been an extremely close group. Now, we are having a reunion in September, and there are only about eight of us left. And there are about twelve or

fourteen widows that come.

Other Voice: I am going to the birthday party. I'll bring you a piece of birthday cake.

Davis: You went to what? The birthday party?

Other Voice: I am going to one now.

Davis: Oh, okay.

Other Voice: I'll be right back.

Driscoll: We are not too far from wrapping up here.

Davis: Then bring two pieces back.

Other Voice: All right.

Driscoll: No, no. Not for me. I didn't mean it that way.

Davis: It was written on the elevator, somebody was having a birthday here.

Driscoll: All right, tell me, I assume you have been getting together, having that reunion since the end of the war?

Davis: Yea. It was every five years we've gotten together. And then we started losing a few guys. And pretty soon it became every two years. And now it is every year.

Driscoll: Okay.

Davis: And I think we've had about twelve.

[Side B of Tape 1.]

Davis: It was a memorial, the memorial hadn't been inaugurated yet.

Driscoll: Which memorial?

Davis: The World War II memorial.

Driscoll: Okay.

Davis: Had not been, what do you call it? It had not been opened yet, but it was up, and

the only thing working was the fountains. And they were working on them. It was about three weeks before they opened it. Tom Brokaw was there, so many people were there. It was an extremely impressive thing, and we walked around the horseshoe affair, Milton and I. I had my white cane, because I didn't know if there were going to be some steps. I do steps pretty good with a cane, otherwise I'm not very good at it. And we went over, and we stopped in front of the things, Guadalcanal. I thought about a few things. And I was getting kind of emotional about it. And somebody pulls me, and says, "Are you veterans?" Well, he is one here, too. He is a Navy veteran. And I says, "Yea." "Could we take your pictures?" And all at once, "Sure, you can take our picture." We were standing in front of what FDR said about it being his quote about the war. And one of his quotes. And all at once, I realized, looking around, there were a whole bunch of kids. And they started gathering around. And some of the older people, forties and fifties, and so on, came up and shook our hands.

Driscoll: Oh. Wow.

Davis: And we, sudden, what do you call it? They were shaking our hands, and patting us on the back, and we were the only old ones there. We were, I don't know what you would call us. Famous.

Driscoll: Oh, okay. Well.

Davis: And it was one of the most emotional things I have. My kids come up, and so on. But I did not realize we are dying at the rate of eleven hundred a day.

Driscoll: A day. Right.

Davis: Seventeen, out of the seventeen thousand, eleven thousand have died. From that war. So, that is something someone said to me, "Why do they call it the Big War?" All at once, we were kind of famous. They were shaking our hands, and walking up. Little kids would come up and say, "You a veteran?" "Yea." "You were? You were in the war?" I'd say, "Yea." A bunch of school kids were there. Because they like to bring the school kids a little bit early.

Driscoll: Sure.

Davis: So it was a very emotional experience for both Milton and I. But, mine, I am sure the boys, the ones you get from Iwo Jima, now that was, there were many killed there.

Driscoll: Yea. Yea.

- Davis: Our original outfit was decimated, almost.
- Driscoll: I interviewed a Navy doctor who was at Iwo Jima.
- Davis: Who?
- Driscoll: A Navy doctor. And he was ashore. And his commander said, "Go back to the hospital ships, and go to the mess hall. If they can sit up and feed themselves, send them back to the beach." They were that desperate. Losing so many men. That was just terrible. I was able to go to Iwo Jima in 1958.
- Davis: You were? Were you in the Marines?
- Driscoll: Yea.
- Davis: Oh, what outfit?
- Driscoll: Mostly in the 2nd Division. I was with an air and naval gunfire company. We called in air strikes and gunfire. And the last year, I was with the 3rd Division, on Okinawa. I taught basic electronics, but this was twelve, fifteen years after your time.
- Davis: Sure. Sure.
- Driscoll: But even, well, what was it? It was fifteen years after, Iwo Jima was still just a pile of ash. You would walk and sink to your ankles. It is like an ash pile.
- Davis: That sand. That black sand.
- Driscoll: Yea. But under it, there is rock. And the rock was just all cut and cubby-holed.
- Davis: Well, two of our men who are still coming, Bonham, Dick Bonham, and Jerry Reese, are coming. Now, Jerry comes, see. He is from Indiana, lives in Florida. Bonham is in Seattle, near Seattle. They both went back to the dedication of the memorial on Iwo Jima. And the people were a little sore at them, the Japanese people that came, that were there. They visited there quite often, they have a tourist area for the Japanese. They were a little stand-offish.
- Driscoll: Did you join any of the vets organizations when you came out, John?
- Davis: Yea. I was, for a while, I was in AmVets, when I had the plumbing and heating company down in Savannah, Illinois. And then I belong to the VFW here. And also, but I never joined the Legion. That is the only organizations. I could have

joined the Legion but I just didn't. Don't know why. Milton and I both joined the VFW just recently. I was commander of the AmVets in Savannah, Illinois, because we just formed it. Two of us worked at it, finally got a charter and stuff like that.

Driscoll: Yea. When you look back now, from fifty, sixty years later, what do you feel about having had to go and having been part of it?

Davis: We wanted to go. In World War II. They had attacked us. And they had killed thousands of our kids, you know. We actually, wanted to. As I said, I had two teeth pulled because I was afraid I'd have to bite down on a tongue blade and I'd go ouch, and they'd go, you know. I didn't need them pulled. But I was just afraid that I would be, and one of the boys from Belmont, Wisconsin, committed suicide. He was a roommate of ours, and his dad wouldn't let him go. And actually bought him a farm, and put him on the farm, and the boy wanted to go so badly. He felt so bad and he was such a good friend of ours, like that, and he thought he just kind of lost his feeling of self-worth. To the point where he committed suicide.

Driscoll: That is tragic.

Davis: Yes, it was tragic. He was a might fine boy. His dad should have let him go to war. But he was a farm boy, and he was from Belmont, just outside of Belmont. But he just felt that he was nothing.

Driscoll: That is something.

Davis: It was a very emotional time for most of the kids. No, I didn't mind going. I came back, and after I sold my things, ownership in the restaurant and plumbing and heating company, which I was not at all suited for, at all, I went through medical school up until pre-med. Finished pre-med and the first two years of medical school. I went on the GI Bill.

Driscoll: Yes. That is the other one I was going to ask.

Davis: Yea, on the GI Bill.

Driscoll: That was a great thing.

Davis: Yes, it was. And it was used correctly, by so many people. Some of them took 52-50, you know. [\$50 a week for 50 weeks.] And various other ways of doing. But I had four or five of the boys that I had working for me in the plumbing company, you had to have a master plumber in your employ, in Illinois, before you could

even life a pipe wrench. So, he was an old man, and I bought him out. And he was training my kids, on the job training. And most of them stayed there in plumbing. Matter of fact, I sold the company to a couple of the journeymen there.

Driscoll: Okay. That is a good idea.

Davis: So, I mean, there were so many things they could do with the GI Bill.

Driscoll: Well, you could also buy a house, and that got the housing industry up and running.

Davis: At very, very low interest rates. You could buy the down payment for little or nothing. Of course, that was true of student loans, too. Got a bad name. Don't know why it did. I never got a student loan. I got married. I was a junior in med school and she was a nurse. She died four years ago. I gave her a Ph. T. "Putting Hubby Through." The last two years of med school, she put me through.

Driscoll: I have heard of many, many of those.

Davis: And I have been very successful. Since. I was in family practice in Markesan. And they appreciated the fact that I was a veteran. It was a farming community, and very few of the boys in that town were in the war. And then I went into residency in radiology, and then came to the Dean Clinic, and was with them as the chairman of the department of radiology for eighteen years. And then I retired.

Driscoll: I have a cousin, she is not an MD. But she is in, she does something in radiology.

Davis: X-ray technology?

Driscoll: No, she doesn't, like, give x-rays.

Davis: Oh, she doesn't? Is she in nuclear medicine?

Driscoll: I'm not sure. She makes a tremendous amount of money, I know that. I think she, does she develop, like a doctor will tell her what he wants and she will figure out how to get it? I'm not sure what she does. But she likes it. And she makes a tremendous amount of money doing it. She is out in Denver right now.

Davis: Other than radiologist, they are kind of journeymen. The x-ray technicians, and maybe she is a chief technician. I had nineteen girls working for me.

Driscoll: I know she rides a horse, and her horse died. So she flew to Germany and bought another horse and flew the horse back. That is the kind of money she is making.

- Davis: Well, a good x-ray technician is a valuable person, very valuable person. I had several of them in my employ. I just fought tooth and toenail to get them raises because they were so good. They were not only teachers for the new ones coming in, but they could satisfy any doctor, any radiologist with the quality of x-rays. We're only as good as our technicians.
- Driscoll: Yea.
- Davis: We really don't see something because of the technician, then we all suffer a little.
- Driscoll: Well, this is a remarkable story.
- Davis: No, I didn't do anything.
- Driscoll: Well, you know, I write, and I had a good friend, Stephen Ambrose, who just passed away. And he had written about thirty books. And he was giving a talk to some World War II vets a couple of years ago. And most of the guys were saying, "I really didn't do much, you know." And he, of course, Ambrose was a very flamboyant speaker, and he said, "Would you World War II vets stand up?" And a bunch of guys stood up. And he looked at them, and he said, "You were giants!" And they kind of looked around at each other. And he said, "You went out and saved the world." Everybody doing your thing. That is what you guys did, you know.
- Davis: Well, we worked hard. I mean it wasn't just digging fox holes real fast. But, I was particularly hard on the new recruits that would come in. Well, they went through college on the GI Bill and then they, still the war was going on. Not the GI Bill, but V-6s and V-12s. And they kind of treated it, and I said, "Listen, you guys, I am going to get somebody up here and let someone shoot him, and let you see what can happen to you." They just didn't realize that death is not a pleasant thing to see, and particularly if it is a good friend. To see him fall is terrible. So, we took everything quite seriously. We didn't fool around.
- Driscoll: Okay, well, I am going to wrap this up. This is tremendous. What I will do is, I will take this to the museum.
- Davis: Is there going to be a sort of atlas of the guys who went through the service? I don't know what you would call it.
- Driscoll: I don't know. I can find out. I don't know what they are doing on that. My end of it is just doing the interviews. But I can find out. They are a great bunch down there. This will get typed up, and they'll send a copy. And I'll tell them to send a

copy of the tape, also. Okay. I need a release that allows me to show this. And I have to sign it. John, do you have a middle initial?

Davis: Oh, B. John B Davis.

Driscoll: This allows them, and I sign it also. They don't let just anybody wandering in off the square look at this stuff, but students, authors, researchers, they will. If you will sign it, here is a pen.

Davis: You will have to put your finger there. Am I on it.?

Driscoll: Yep, you're on it.

Davis: Oh, the MD. I shouldn't have put that on it. They won't let me do surgery any more.

Driscoll: Well, you earned it.

Davis: I wonder if, well, I like to teach, and since I have been retired, I go on missions for the Methodist Church. I have been on fifteen missions, as a physician. I was all the way from Malaysia to South America, Central America, Mexico.

Driscoll: Oh, wow.

Davis: And all over. And then I visit, and give talks on drugs and stuff on Indian reservations. For some reason or other, my dad used to talk at the Indian reservation, the Indian school, rather, up at Tomah, Wisconsin, before it became the VA. It was an Indian school.

Driscoll: Oh, I didn't know that.

Davis: And he used to go out there and talk to them. And I have talked to the Choctaw Indians, the Sioux, many out in South Dakota and I have gone down to New Mexico. But about fifteen were overseas, abroad. Not all domestic. And a lot of that. Well, I have been retired now, almost twenty years.

Driscoll: I've been retired six, and I have never been busier, but I've never enjoyed myself more, either.

Davis: Oh, I got into so many things.

[End of Interview]