

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
FRANK DUESLER
Radio Operator, Marine Corps, World War II
2002

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Duesler, Frank, (1921-2007). Oral History Interview, 2002.

User copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 68 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 68 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Videorecording: 1 video cassette (ca. 68 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder)

Abstract:

Frank Duesler, a Dogdeville, Wisconsin native, discusses his service in the Marine Corps in World War II as a radio operator with the 2nd Marine Raider Battalion, Company F, known as Carlson's Raiders. Duesler reveals he joined the Marine Corps in 1940 on a five dollar bet. He discusses boot camp in San Diego (California) and how his drill instructor made him drag buckets of wet sand from the ocean as a punishment. Next Duesler describes his radio school training: he learned Morse code, semaphore (flag signaling), and how to use field-operated radios. He mentions working with Native American radiomen who spoke Navajo to prevent the Japanese from understanding their messages. In 1942, Duesler joined Carlson's Raiders, a battalion run by Lieutenant Colonel Evans Fordyce Carlson. Duesler describes intense physical training and high dropout rates on Jacques Farm (California). He relates the Raiders went to Honolulu (Hawaii) and lived on a Dole pineapple farm, learning to survive off the land. Duesler recalls Companies A and B participating in the Makin Island Raid, although his company was not involved. Next, Duesler states the Raiders moved to Espiritu Santos for jungle training. While there, Duesler describes an incident in which a Marine with twenty-five years experience as a gunner was sent back to the U.S. for being gay. Duesler discusses at length his first major campaign at Guadalcanal. A speech by Lieutenant Colonel Carlson stood out in Duesler's mind because Carlson informed the troops that during the landing on Guadalcanal there would be no medical facilities and wounded men would be abandoned. Duesler comments that because of the unusually dangerous circumstances, Carlson offered the Marines the chance to return to the ship without penalty, but not a single Marine chose to leave. Duesler describes the landing and the difficulty of using radios in the jungle. After the siege, he got malaria and was sent to New Zealand to recover in the care of a civilian woman. He mentions he weighed only 100 lbs when he arrived, but due to this woman's care, he put on enough weight that he was sent back to Carlson's Raiders. Duesler details his next mission: he was in the first wave of troops to land at Bougainville (Papua New Guinea). He mentions there were thirty-five men in his boat and only three made it across the beach. He describes vividly how several of his buddies were killed. Once he reached the beach, Duesler tells the story of encountering a snake in the jungle and getting the "most horrendous scare of my life." Duesler reports that after he stared down the snake, a Japanese soldier appeared where the snake had been and was "eyeball to eyeball" with Duesler until the soldier suddenly disappeared. Once Bougainville was secured, Duesler relates the Army came in to relieve the Marines, but before they would stay, they made the Marines dig a nine by nine mile square trench around the island. In 1945, Duesler was sent to Guam to prepare for the invasion of Japan. He recalls being on a troop ship

headed for Japan when the news arrived that the war was over. The ship was rerouted to Tsingtao in North China. Duesler explains his mission was to round up Japanese soldiers in China who did not know the war had ended. He briefly describes the food in China and interactions with Chinese civilians, including a confrontation with a rickshaw driver who Duesler alleges was trying to rob or kill him and his buddies. Duesler describes coming home to Madison (Wisconsin) and having difficulty finding work. He states he opened a woodworking business and later sold plywood in Madison, and he refers to his marriage of twenty-seven years to an elementary school teacher. Duesler states he did not join any veterans groups or have an interest in attending reunions. He mentions that his closest friends from the Marine Corps were all killed in the war.

Biographical Sketch:

Duesler (1921-2007) was born in Dodgeville, Wisconsin, but grew up on a farm in Barneveld and later in Madison. In 1940, he joined the Marine Corps and became a radio operator, later volunteering for Carlson's Raiders, the 2nd Marine Raider Battalion, F Company. Duesler served in World War II and participated in campaigns in Guadalcanal and Bougainville (Papua New Guinea). After the surrender of Japan, he was stationed in Guam and then North China. Duesler left the Marines in 1945 with the rank of Staff Sergeant. He returned to Madison and worked as a cab driver before opening his own shop, Creative Wood Products, and going into the plywood business. Later in life, Duesler married a first grade teacher and they were happily married for twenty-seven years.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2002.

Transcribed by Michael L. Weber & Katy Marty, 2006 & 2008.

Transcript edited by Channing Welch, 2009

Corrections typed and abstract written by Darcy Gervasio, 2009.

Interview Transcript:

James: Good afternoon here. It's the 18th of July, 2002, and I'm talking to Frank Duesler. Where were you born, sir?

Frank: In -- where was I born?

James: Yes sir.

Frank: In Dodgeville, Wisconsin.

James: Born in Dodgeville and when was that?

Frank: That was February, 1921. It's awhile ago.

James: February of '21. So, what were you doing on December 7, 1941? Were you in the service by then or not?

Frank: Oh yes, yes. I don't know what I was doing.

James: You went in the service in what year?

Frank: August 1, 1940.

James: Okay, and you enlisted then in the –

Frank: In the Marine Corps.

James: In the Marine Corps.

Frank: Yeah.

James: [Unintelligible] Private.

Frank: Yeah. It was on a \$5 bet and I never did collect it.

James: Oh my goodness!

Frank: This guy bet me they wouldn't let me in [laughs].

James: Wow. Were you working at the time, or what were you doing at the time?

Frank: Oh, things were tough. I was delivering telegrams and driving taxicabs and things of that nature.

James: In Dodgeville?

Frank: No, in Madison.

James: Oh, by that time you had moved to Madison.

Frank: Oh, I moved to Madison when I was about that long.

James: Oh, I see. So, you lived in Dodgeville briefly then?

Frank: Yeah. Well, we had a farm out near Barneveld until I was five or six years old. Then we moved to Madison.

James: I see. So, you went to school here?

Frank: Yes, Central High School.

James: Central High School –

Frank: I lived closer [unintelligible].

James: [Unintelligible].

Frank: I went there and I took a year of post-graduate, actually post high school.

James: Oh, and where was that, at the university?

Frank: Same place.

James: Oh [unintelligible]

Frank: Yeah. Central High.

James: Oh. What'd they offer on the post-graduate level?

Frank: To be honest, I don't remember what I took.

James: Oh.

Frank: But it was just from a list of available courses, whatever they were.

James: I see. Okay. And when the war was starting to warm up in Europe did you begin to think about the military, or how did that come about?

Frank: I don't remember why it came by except the Marines had an attention-getting campaign going on at the time, I guess--And made it very clear that there wasn't any better outfit.

James: Right [unintelligible].

Frank: At least, that was what they said [laughs].

James: [laughs] So, where did you sign up? In Madison?

Frank: Yes.

James: And, then they sent you to boot camp in San Diego, was it?

Frank: That's correct, yes.

James: How did that—how long was that, at that time?

Frank: How long was boot camp?

James: Yeah.

Frank: It was quite a few weeks but I can't remember that clear.

James: Uh huh. Were you in pretty good shape as far as you got into that business?

Frank: I think I was because I didn't have any problems with the stuff they put on us. The DI had a favorite—you know if somebody annoyed him in any way, he'd tell ya take that bucket and fill it with sand and then take it down to the ocean and get it wet, and then bring it back. And the ocean was a quarter of a mile away, but a bucket of wet sand is awful heavy. That was his favorite pastime though. I don't remember how many buckets of sand I brought back.

James: After you finished your basic at boot camp, then what did the Marine Corps have you do?

Frank: Well, there was a list of possible routes to take and I thought I'd take communications. So, they sent me to radio school where I learned –

James: That was 1941 thereafter?

Frank: Let's see. Well, it probably was, yeah.

James: In August your basic probably lasted at least two months probably—

France: Yes.

James: --radio school--late '40 when you're into [unintelligible].

Frank: Yeah. They taught us how to send Morse code, how to deal with the electronic field operated radios that you had to crank the generator and stuff like that. It took three guys to carry the radio.

James: Where did that training occur?

Frank: In San Diego.

James: Same place.

Frank: I don't remember when, but I spent a lot of time taking lessons of some sort or another at a place called Camp Pendleton. It's right near –

James: Well, its right there.

Frank: Yeah. It's not far away, but it's not in the town. It's out in the boondocks.

James: Okay. Well, it's not where you had your basic then. Camp Pendleton, is that where you had your basic training?

Frank: That's where I had my basic war training. My basic Marine Corps training was at the base.

James: Right. Now we need to know about (??) the radio training.

Frank: That was at the base, in San Diego, right there.

James: Okay. And how long did that school take?

Frank: Boy, you're taxing my memory.

James: Oh, well, I mean--

Frank: It probably was three or four months, I'm going to guess, but I don't know.

James: And you learned Morse code, to send and get?

Frank: We learned Morse, yes, send and get. And we'd stand up on a rock and wave semaphore.

James: Oh, you learned that, too?

Frank: Oh yeah.

James: [unintelligible]

Frank: They taught us all that stuff.

James: Uh huh. Good. And the Army's [unintelligible] codes, [unintelligible] and all that?

Frank: Yeah. I had to learn that and the Morse codes.

James: Okay.

Frank: And, we had the--when the war got going we had Indians from the Southwest. I can't remember what kind, what their tribe name was. But, all throughout the war, when we had to talk on the radio, the Indians did it, because the Japanese didn't understand.

James: Navajo.

Frank: Yeah. That was it. They'd listen to us and know what we're talking about, but they couldn't understand the Navajos.

James: That came later, though.

Frank: While I (??) was in Carlson's Raiders.

James: What's that?

Frank: While I was in Carlson's Raiders.

James: Right, but I haven't gotten to that yet. Now, let's get back to radio school.

Frank: Oh. All right (??)

James: Then where'd you go?

Frank: Camp Pendleton, I think.

James: Oh, that's where you were. You left Hawaii (??) out of there.

Frank: That was after the war started.

James: Oh, I see. Now you finished radio school sometime at the end of October '40?

Frank: No.

James: [unintelligible]

Frank: I joined it in August of '40. So January—did I tell you-- it was in probably early 1941 when I got out of that radio school because they taught us so much and it isn't just like teaching you the alphabet. It's a –

James: Where did they send you then, after radio school?

Frank: Well, that's when-- I'm pretty sure it was Camp Pendleton.

James: Well, you didn't move at all then.

Frank: I didn't get off the West Coast.

James: I see. So, in 1941 you were on the West Coast?

Frank: Still there, yeah.

James: Okay.

Frank: And then Evans Fordyce Carlson got his show on the road and I signed up for that.

James: But that was after Pearl Harbor.

Frank: Oh, yeah, yeah.

James: What were you doing in 1941? I guess that's what I've been trying to remember here.

Frank: Well, I was just going through the normal peacetime routine and going off to Los Angeles on weekends.

James: Okay. And, where were you when the news of Pearl Harbor arrived?

Frank: I don't remember.

James: Okay. And what and when did you or where were you when you heard about Carlson's Raiders?

Frank: Well, I was at Camp Pendleton in San Diego. I was somewhere in that general --

James: And they posted this notice that there was a special unit being formed?

Frank: Yeah. I don't remember if they posted it. They spread the word.

James: I see. Did you have a chance to meet General Evans Carlson?

Frank: Oh, yeah. He was there.

James: In my book I have [unintelligible] of the Carlson's Raiders. He talked about that.

Frank: Yeah.

James: I don't know if you've read it. You probably haven't got the book yet.

Frank: Yeah. James Roosevelt was our second-in-command—

James: Right.

Frank: What did we call him, the chief executive, or something? I forget now.

James: So, anyway, now the Carlson's Raiders, where was that training?

Frank: Carlson's Raiders training was at Pendleton. No, no, no; Jacques Farm.

James: Where?

Frank: Jacques Farm it was called. But it's J-A-Q-U-E-S, Jacques. It's somewhere in the San Diego area. [Duesler misspells Jacques on the tape]

James: J-A-Q-U-E-S?

Frank: Ja(c)ques, yes. Farm.

James: Was that pretty intensive, that training?

Frank: Yes. It was heavy. You had to be – I guess a lot of us didn't make it because of physical inability to stay with it, or exertion was too much or something, but it was tough.

James: Can you describe the [unintelligible]?

Frank: Well, we'd march and had to do double-time. We had to do extra miles where a [unintelligible] mile hike was pretty fair. Before that, we'd go on nine and ten mile hikes.

James: Wow.

- Frank: And demonstrate that we could do it. And anybody that wasn't able to do it was transferred out of Carlson's Raiders.
- James: The drop out rate was pretty high?
- Frank: I think it was, yes. I think there were six companies in Carlson's Raiders when it was finally – A-B-C-D-E and F and I was in F Company.
- James: How long was that training?
- Frank: It had to be, I'm guessing, three months. And we weren't allowed liberty, but guys would sneak off and then they'd come back carrying bottles of whiskey. And to get back in you had to hop from rock to rock to get across that big stream there, to get on our side of it, if you went to San Diego. It was fun. I think so, we were all young and full of p and v.
- James: Okay. So then, now, after three months of here (??), you guys were ready to do something.
- Frank: We were ready to go, yeah. So, we went to Honolulu.
- James: But the war hadn't started yet?
- Frank: Oh yeah, the war was going on.
- James: Well, then you were probably training in '42 then.
- Frank: I think so.
- James: I'm going to change that then to '42. Where were you when you heard about Pearl Harbor? You don't remember? Okay.
- Frank: But they got six companies of us and then they sent us to Hawaii. The war was goin' on then. And they probably thought it was smart, but I think it was the dumbest thing that ever happened.
- James: Why was that?
- Frank: They put us on this--what's the name of that outfit that's big in pineapples?
- James: Dole.
- Frank: Dole.
- James: The farm?

Frank: Yeah, I think it's about twelve million square acres, or something.

James: A big farm.

Frank: And it's as smooth as this, it's as level as this table. And there's nothing on it but pineapples, and we were there for about three weeks. And we lived on pineapples, morning, noon and evening, because we were supposed to live off the land. We were learning to do, what do you call it, ah--

James: Survive? [laughs]

Frank: Yeah.

James: Okay.

Frank: But ah, then somewhere along the line, they sent a couple of A and B Company on a submarine to Makin Island and raided that place.

James: I thought I had interviewed a guy who did that.

Frank: Oh yeah? I guess they killed an awful lot of Japanese there. A lot of Marines got killed there and a few of them got left there because they didn't realize it was time to go.

James: They came in on rubber boats, as I understand it.

Frank: Yeah, from submarines.

James: Well, that was an experience in itself.

Frank: Yes. The guys that uh --oh, my mind goes blank. They gave me this totally dishonest doctor gave me radiation treatment for prostate cancer about seven or eight months ago, and about six or eight weeks ago on *NBC Evening News*, two nights in a row, they came out that it was a big mistake and doctors knew it was a mistake, but they got a big payment for doing it. Because if you were in your eighties with prostate cancer, 98 percent of your chance of living filled with cancer, became a problem. You'd be dead by at the age I was. See, at 81-years-old, I never should have had that. And I would have had a good life, but this radiation has screwed things up real much.

James: With your intestinal tract.

Frank: Everything.

James: I never prescribed that. That's what I, that's the work I did.

Frank: Oh.

James: I was a urologist.

Frank: Well –

James: But, I would never give [unintelligible] therapy to anyone at that age.

Frank: Well, the doctor that did it to me had to know because they said that the doctors in that line of work all knew that if you were past eighty, you wouldn't live long enough to suffer from your prostate cancer.

James: No, that's not exactly right.

Frank: Huh?

James: That's not exactly right.

Frank: Well, it's right only if your prostate cancer is recently discovered, it's new. If you've had it for a long time, then that would be different, but –

James: A lot of people still die of those diseases in their 80s.

Frank: You've got to die from something.

James: Yeah, I understand, but this is what I did for twenty-five years, Frank. I know all about prostate cancer.

Frank: Oh, you do, huh?

James: Yeah. Now we're getting off the track here. Let's get back to Carlson's Raiders.

Frank: Oh. Sorry about that.

James: We're trying to get you back from Makin Island.

Frank: Back from Makin Island, that wasn't my company. A and B Company went there.

James: Oh, you didn't go to Makin Island?

Frank: No. But, they came back and then --

James: What did the Raiders do that didn't go to Makin Island?

Frank: We lived on Dole pineapples.

James: Oh.

Frank: Miserable development. Anyhow, then we went from there to Espiritu Santos. You ever heard of it?

James: Yeah, sure.

Frank: The whole Carlson's Raiders went there.

James: Okay. And what did you do there?

Frank: Well, we just set up a big camp and got ourselves prepared for jungle. We had to have –

James: Jungle training.

Frank: Jungle training, which we didn't get earlier.

James: Yeah.

Frank: We had war, kind of, war training, but we didn't have jungle training. So, we did that for, I guess, a couple of months at least. There was some oddball things happened there. We had a Marine gunner with twenty-five or thirty years in service try to physically make love to a young Marine down there in the swimming pool. They ended up making us set a circle of posts in the ground about twelve feet in diameter or so and string barbed wire and they put that Marine gunner in there and he got sent back to the States for being a queer, I guess [laughs].

James: Right.

Frank: But, that was not a normal thing that happened. But it did happen and I don't think I better tell you his name, because –

James: No, it's not important.

Frank: And, ah, when they decided that we'd had enough training, they put us on a bunch of destroyers, four destroyers, and headed for Guadalcanal. And, Carlson was completely in charge. Nobody gave him any—so he had information that told him where the outer limits of the Japanese occupied area of Guadalcanal were, so we went beyond that. I don't know if it was a

mile or two miles, or something, but we went beyond the outer limits of the Japanese occupation and we all went ashore.

James: Was this before the regular landing, or was this after that?

Frank: This was the landing.

James: Oh, I see. This is—you were part of the landing. [unintelligible]

Frank: That's right. It was--we were all by ourselves down there and we got--all of us were there. I don't remember how many there were, seven or eight hundred I guess, Raiders. We were six companies. Anyhow, he got us all collected in a situation where he could speak, Carlson could speak to us, and he told us: "This is a very unusual set of circumstances. We don't have any facilities to take care of you if you get hurt. If you get hurt or sick or wounded or whatever to the point where you can't stay with us, you have to go your own. We have to abandon you. There's nothing we can do. We don't have any doctors with us."

James: You were that far apart from the regular group that landed--

Frank: Oh, yes. There were the Japanese, miles and miles of Japanese between us and the rest of the Marine Corps.

James: In the major landing?

Frank: Yes.

James: Okay (??)

Frank: And, ah – where the hell was I?

James: Something that was [unintelligible] landing.

Frank: Oh, oh, oh. We were told when we landed and we were told in groups that we'd be abandoned if we got hurt, or injured, or whatever, and he says, "Now, I'm going to tell you this right now. If you don't want to go in, under the circumstances, you're free to back out and go back to the ship with no penalty, no punishment, no nothing." And not a single guy switched. We all stayed right there.

James: All stayed [unintelligible].

Frank: Every last one of Carlson's Raiders stayed there.

James: What hundred was that?

Frank: I'm guessing at 800. I don't know.

James: Six companies there were?

Frank: Yes, six companies. And so we stretched out. A Company took the front, and followed by B and F. It was a long, long line of us, but we were in the jungle.

James: When you landed, that wasn't apparent then?

Frank: Oh, no. There was no opposition there at all. The enemy was miles up the beach from us.

James: They didn't know that you—that you were comin' there.

Frank: That's correct, and that's why we didn't have any medical people with us, or any facilities, because we'd be in the jungle and there was nothing anybody could do. So we went into the jungle. I don't remember now whether it was two miles or six miles, but we went in and then we turned to the right and headed north to get behind the Japanese. And then we, when we knew we were behind the Japanese, we angled back toward the beach where the Japanese were. And, that's when the shit hit the fan.

James: You surprised them, I'll bet?

Frank: Oh yes, yes, yes we did.

James: Did you have anything heavier than mortars?

Frank: No.

James: You had machine guns and mortars. That was the heaviest equipment?

Frank: Yeah. That's correct. But we didn't have any cannon, or anything that –

James: It would be hard to drag through that jungle—

Frank: Oh [laughs]

James: --without creating a fuss.

Frank: Yes. But Carlson had a talent that I've never seen anybody else with. He was right across the very front of a long stretch of us guys. And he'd go like this and we'd all stop. And he'd say, "There's two or three Japanese back in there watching us." And he says, "When we go up past them a

ways, I want a squad to come back down and nail them.” How he knew they were there, nobody ever figured out. But he knew and he was right, every time. And the squad would come back down there, sneak back in there and there’d be two or three Japanese watching us and countin’ us and they’d be dead within minutes, but, ah--

James: Did you carry a knife on you?

Frank: I didn’t, but a lot of guys did. I carried --

James: It’s quieter than using your rifles (??).

Frank: I still carry my bayonet, you know, my regular knife. I don’t carry it. I got it hanging on the wall.

James: Sure.

Frank: It’s about that long. Nice knife.

James: Did you carry communication gear ashore?

Frank: Well, we had it, yes.

James: A backpack type of arrangement?

Frank: Well, that was part of it, yes. The generator was on one guy’s back and the transmitter on another guy’s back and the receiver on another. Anyhow, it only took a matter of minutes to get organized and set up. And we had these “war hoops” do the communicating.

James: You had the what?

Frank: Indians.

James: With you at that time?

Frank: Yeah. They were there strictly for communication there because the Japanese--

James: I understand about the Indians.

Frank: But the Japanese could listen, but they wouldn't know what the hell they said.

James: I see.

Frank: If they listened to you or me, they'd know what we said, because they –

James: They're well know, in fact. Everyone knows about the Navajos.

Frank: Oh.

James: There's a whole movie out on them. It just came out.

Frank: Oh, they did?

James: Sure [unintelligible]. You ought to see it [unintelligible].

Frank: About them communicating like that?

James: Oh, sure.. Right. It's all about the talkers.

Frank: Oh, well—

James: What do you know about them? How did you get along with them?

Frank: Oh, I got along fine with them. I didn't have any conflict, or nothing. Just everybody got along--

James: Did everybody like them?

Frank: Seemed like it. I don't remember anybody being unhappy about it.

James: I see.

Frank: But ah, --

James: So then how far inland did you go?

Frank: I would guess that we had gone in about five miles because the Japanese were on the shoreline there. They didn't stick by the water. They-- in the jungle, they'd be back a mile or two and we had to find them and--

James: You snuck up behind them as a group.

Frank: Yeah.

James: Then you started shooting from there(??) ?

Frank: Well, we surprised 'em, yeah. We killed, we got credit for killing many thousands of them but I'm pretty sure that only sixteen of us were killed.

James: In your group?

Frank: In the Raider Battalion.

James: In the Raider Battalion, okay. Were you busy then that you remember while this was going on?

Frank: Not really. It was-- so much communications was passed on a word of mouth because there'd be guys lined up, one behind the other for quite a long ways in the jungle. You stayed on your own trail. You couldn't widen out. **[End of Tape 1, Side A]**

James: I was thinking that it might be difficult to transmit by radio with all the jungle.

Frank: It wasn't easy. We'd have to figure out a way to have a guy--

James: Go up a tree (??)

Frank: Yeah, or find a hill somewhere if he could or whatever.

James: Good.

Frank: But the communications was basically just within our own group. We didn't communicate with the rest of the Marine Corps.

James: Did they shoot at you, Frank?

Frank: Oh, yeah.

James: You?

Frank: Oh, they shot at me but they didn't nail me.

James: They spotted you as the radio man? And they started to take you out (??)?

Frank: I don't remember if they were. They put bullets in the radio. I'm not sure that's what they were trying to do but that's what they did.

James: They didn't knock the radio out.

Frank: Oh, yeah.

James: Oh.

Frank: But, ah --

James: It was useless.

Frank: It was complete, yeah, after the bullets ran through it. But then --

James: You just left it there on the ground?

Frank: Just leave it there, it's no good.

James: Now you're an infantry man. You think you [unintelligible].

Frank: Oh, we got semaphore flags.

James: [unintelligible]

Frank: Telephone, and telephones we had--

James: Direct line?

Frank: Wire on the-- wire on the big reels that we had.

James: Landlines.

Frank: Yeah. They would spread them around out and communicate. We only did it when it was practical. If it wasn't practical we didn't fool with it.

James: I understand.

Frank: The thing was that for all the Japanese we killed I think the ratio was way over 100 to 1 that we killed.

James: I'm not interested in those numbers. I'm interested in what happened to Frank Duesler.

Frank: Oh, oh, oh.

James: The other stuff we can get out of books.

Frank: Oh.

James: I want to know how you lived in the jungle. That's what we want to know here.

Frank: Well, it wasn't easy but we made it. It--

James: Are those vines very sticky and tear your clothes?

Frank: No, I never had a problem with that.

James: Okay.

Frank: The biggest problem we were faced with was eighty-seven zillion mosquitoes.

James: Did you get malaria?

Frank: Yeah.

James: Didn't you take your Atabrine?

Frank: Did pretty good as long as the mosquitoes were so thick and so busy bitin' and there were so many of them.

James: If you took your Atabrine you wouldn't get malaria. You wouldn't have it. You'd get the symptoms of malaria anyway, but you don't get it. I know.

Frank: We--mosquito nets hang over our heads, and they did get you. You know you had to have your hand uncovered somewhere along the line and, boom, there'd be seventeen mosquitoes on it.

James: I'll be darned.

Frank: But ah, anyhow. I got the malaria so bad, from all that mosquitoes that when we got back off Guadalcanal and back down on Espiritu San—

James: Santos.

Frank: I think that's it, yeah, where they sent me and a few other guys that were in bad shape to New Zealand. They were-- because no hospital there and there was some woman who lived about fifty or sixty miles from there that sent in a request to the hospital for three non--

James: [unintelligible]

Frank: No, non-contaminating sicknesses. She wanted three Marines to come up to live at her place for a couple of weeks but she didn't want guys that would be spreading diseases; bullet wounds or in my case malaria, which was over with and stuff like that. And so I weighed 100 pounds, down to 100 pounds because of the mosquito bites and they sent me up to this woman's house and she had three really sharp looking young daughters living there, all in their teens, 19, 18, 20. So--

James: You got lucky {??}.

Frank: So we paired off, each one of us. Anyhow, she would send me up a bowl of, oh, corn flakes or something with pure cream on it, had acres of sugar, and two weeks later when I got sent back to the hospital I put on, believe it or not, enough pounds that they decided the hell with him. He ain't going back to the States. He's going back up the island. So they sent me back up to the islands. But I was underweight, but I wasn't as bad as to begin with. So instead of sending me back to the States they sent me back up to the islands and in the meantime old Colonel Carlson who had made an awful lot of high level enemies in the Marine Corps, was out. He had made so much spectacular moves they even made a movie about him.

James: So where did they send you?

Frank: So they put, kept us together as a group but they sent us to Bougainville. And Bougainville, you've heard of it I'm sure.

James: I know about it.

Frank: And--

James: Had they already landed there?

Frank: Oh, Carlson's Raiders?

James: Had the Marines made the landing at Bougainville or not yet?

Frank: No, I was in the first wave.

James: Ah, okay.

Frank: And it was thirty-five of us in that boat with the [unintelligible] down that went out.

James: [unintelligible]

Frank: Yeah, and only three of us got across the beach.

James: They were waves waiting for you?

Frank: Yes, and "Ironman," I forget his name now, it doesn't matter. He was our commanding officer. And he was half-way across the beach when he made a stupid mistake. He stood up to holler at us guys to "Stay down, men!"

and he was dead before his knees buckled. Because he stood up and they had him. But me and two other guys made it.

James: Crawling along the sand or did you find a bunker?

Frank: Well, no. We got-- the beach was maybe as wide as from here to those cupboards.

James: Uh huh.

Frank: And then there was a vertical little cliff about this high with bushes on it.

James: Something you could get behind.

Frank: And me and two other guys made it to that, only the first boat. There was other boats of course.

James: Of course.

Frank: Following. But I got the biggest, most horrendous scare of my life there. I don't know if I mentioned it in that letter or not. I inched up after I was there for a few minutes or a few seconds or whatever and I sort of inched up to look around and see what the hell was there and here I am face to face with the biggest, bright green snake I'd ever seen in my life. His head was bigger than my hand, and his eyes were about that far apart. He had this, he must have been about eight inches from me because his tongue, he never touched--

James: Came out.

Frank: He never touched me, but his tongue was just like this—it would go. And he just scared the living bejesus out of me.

James: I'll bet.

Frank: Yeah, and—

James: So who did move, he or you?

Frank: Well, I don't know. Well, I did. I don't know whether it was two seconds or ten seconds of terror there and I backed down. A few seconds later I don't know, maybe a minute, whatever the hell it was, I looked back up to see if he was still there and there was a Jap soldier there eyeball to eyeball with me. The snake was gone and that Jap soldier, it was like somebody turned off a light. He was there and then he wasn't. How the hell he

disappeared so quickly I don't know, but he, he and I were eyeball to eyeball for just about a tenth of a second I guess.

James: Just like the snake.

Frank: Yeah, but the snake was gone. But I think with all the cannon fire and machine guns and rifles and grenades and whatever, I think that snake was scared, more terrified than I was. And I never did check out to see what the hell kind of snake he was but he was big and he was --

James: The Jap, it must have scared him, too.

Frank: Yeah.

James: So you moved inland further.

Frank: Oh yeah, yeah. We moved on in. Quite a few of us got killed.

James: Did you get threatened with [unintelligible]?

Frank: No, but I was as close to a couple of guys as I am to you that, got one guy got--

James: You said there were only three of you of the landing craft made it.

Frank: Three of us guys were but there were other boats behind it.

James: I understand there must have been a lot of landing crafts.

Frank: Yeah.

James: In your landing craft there were only three out of the--

Frank: That's right, yeah. This one guy, a friend of mine brought over and maybe as far away as that chair over there, he was sittin' on a tree stump or something bent forward like this and a Japanese mortar hit him right where his backbone and his belt crossed and it cut him in two just like a big saber.

James: Oh.

Frank: And his tip, his upper half torqued for a few seconds but that's all and he was gone. Another guy that was just as close -- well, that's how lucky I was. Another guy that was just as close as maybe you are. I don't know whether a hand grenade or he stepped on a mine or somethin' but both of

his feet were sliced off right at the ankles. It was just neat and clean. His feet weren't destroyed. They were laying there.

James: I'll be darned.

Frank: And he's three feet away with just bloody ends on both ankles. It's-- that was it for him, but I lucked out. I never got a scratch or bullet or nothing.

James: Boy, you sure were lucky.

Frank: Yeah. And I should have got a pat on the back for something one night. It wasn't due to bravery or nothing. It was due to being alert. We were sitting around in this little clearing. Everybody had a foxhole. There was about eight of us, I guess, maybe nine or ten. We're just sitting there in the middle of the night. It was pitch dark, totally dark but we were just sitting there talking very quietly. We didn't want to make noise, and I don't know, it was every five minutes or every eight minutes, or whatever, four U.S. Marine artillery shells would go right over us into the Japanese. First you hear four "boom, boom, boom, boom," and a couple seconds later you hear "whish, wish, wish." The shells had made a whishing noise when they—and I, we were all chatting, I counted the four booms and then there were three whishes, and I hollered "Everybody in your hole!" and everybody got in their hole. And that fourth one that didn't wish and it landed right in one guy's foxhole and turned him into hamburger, but nobody else got hurt. We'd all been killed if we sat up on the edges of the foxholes like we had been.

James: A short round.

Frank: A short round, yeah. It sure was. Yeah.

James: You said when you made that landing you still had your radio equipment?

Frank: No, I was just carrying a submachine gun. Thompson.

James: Oh, you were no longer a radioman.

Frank: Yeah, but they didn't have me using the radio then.

James: I see.

Frank: I don't know why. I had a Thompson submachine gun and my big butcher knife, hand grenades and that kind of stuff but --

James: I see.

- Frank: All fun stuff.
- James: So, now you're on the beach and how did you move in? Did you wait until the next day when it was clear?
- Frank: Yeah, well, we just inched our way shooting and fighting and we were told they wanted eighty-one square miles. They wanted us to go in nine miles and nine miles across and nine miles back up, nine times nine. And so we did it. We had that area completely and the Japanese were outside that area.
- James: Bougainville was not very big though.
- Frank: No, but it was big enough to deal with nine miles of jungle and then they decided that we would—we had taken the eighty-one square miles of it. It was all completely U.S. property and they decided that they would turn that nine miles, eighty-one square miles, nine miles square, over to the U.S. Army and take us out. So they ordered it. They got us ready and the Army come marching in and one of the first guys in the Army lead platoon saw one of our guys sittin' up on a rock or something cleaning his weapon and he shot him dead. Yeah. They panicked and he didn't realize he was not shooting at Japanese. He thought he was. But anyhow we turned it over to the Army and we were all down at the beach ready to get on the ship and get the hell out of there when word came back down that the Japanese had blown the Army out of the way and were coming back and we had to go and do it again. And we had to and chase them back to the nine miles square again. And we did.
- James: How long did that take?
- Frank: [sighs] A week I guess, or something. See, they were living out of their knapsacks then. They weren't in their own area and we chased them. Anyhow, this ah, Army brass decided that the only way they would relieve us and let us go was we were to dig a six foot deep trench nine miles, nine miles, nine miles. So that the Army could stay in a trench and protect that area. So we did it.
- James: You did that? That took quite awhile.
- Frank: Well, there was everybody, an awful lot of guys digging.
- James: [laughs] Sure.
- Frank: But--
- James: Nine miles of trench, that's nine plus nine plus nine.

Frank: It's twenty-seven miles.

James: Twenty-seven miles of trench.

Frank: Yeah. But I don't know if it's still there or not. If it is it's probably full of water.

James: Did your malaria flare up?

Frank: Well, I was over that and was back on quinine.

James: Oh, you finally got the pill? The Atabrine. Turned your skin yellow (??)

Frank: I don't remember that part but maybe it did. But ah--

James: Whatever, it didn't bother ya?

Frank: No, I was okay there on Bougainville.

James: Okay. Well, when you finished the trench digging where did they send you?

Frank: That was, that spent all our time overseas. They sent us back to San Diego because we had been over there so long. Two years.

James: You were in Bougainville twice, then.

Frank: Huh?

James: You were in Bougainville twice?

Frank: No. We never left it. We were down at the beach waiting for our ship.

James: Oh, you never really left.

Frank: We hadn't left. We were just waiting to leave when the Army sent word that they wouldn't take it away, they wouldn't relieve us until we put that trench in for 'em.

James: Do you recall when it was that you left Bougainville and went back?

Frank: Not as far as the date.

James: A month, or a year?

Frank: I don't know. I don't remember. But we'd been over there two years I guess and then came back.

James: Then you came back to San Diego?

Frank: Yeah. Came back to Camp Pendleton.

James: That's (??) San Diego.

Frank: I know.

James: What was your duty then?

Frank: Mostly just casual. You ever hear of casual companies? Well, that's what I was in, a casual company. And I didn't have any specific duties there.

James: Did you have plans to get the money to go home to see your folks?

Frank: Oh, yes, I did get to see them on relief and, you know, the leaves and what the hell did they call them? It wasn't holidays.

James: It was leave.

Frank: Yeah. It was leave, yeah.

James: Thirty day leave, probably (??)

Frank: True. [laughs]

James: Okay.

Frank: But we were still [unintelligible].

James: So you're back to Dodgeville then?

Frank: Back--well Madison, Dodgeville, yeah. I was just born in Dodgeville. I didn't stay there very long.

James: Right. So then [unintelligible] your folks were doing okay and so forth? Did they know what you were doing?

Frank: Oh ,yeah.

James: You were on good (??), you were not afraid of fitting in there (??)?

Frank: No, my parents and I weren't what you'd call--

James: Letter writers?

Frank: That's right. I don't think my old man drew a civic breath all during my life time.

James: Oh, oh no. That's too bad.

Frank: Yeah, yeah.

James: Then, you were probably pretty close to your mom then.

Frank: Well, sort of, yeah, but when I joined the Marines and left, I was out of their lives pretty much.

James: You felt like you were on your own?

Frank: Yeah, I knew I was on my own, yeah. No question about that. I never did get the five dollars from that guy that bet me five dollars the Marines wouldn't let me in.

James: [laughs] So--

Frank: He's dead now. He died just not too long ago.

James: So, you went to San Diego and then you stayed there until the end of the war?

Frank: No, they sent me back overseas and we went to, ah, I can't think of the name of the island. But it was a preparation island and we got prepared and they put us aboard ship and we were pegged for the invasion of Japan.

James: That had to be at the end of the war then.

Frank: The war was, it wasn't at the end at that time. We were going to invade Japan.

James: Yes, I know.

Frank: And we were --

James: Was that Saipan or was that Guam? It seems like--

Frank: Well, I think it was Guam. Guam.

James: There was a staging area.

- Frank: I think so (??)
- James: Do you recall when you went to Guam? Sometime in '45 then.
- Frank: Yeah, it'd be that, yeah. But that's when the decision to have us invade Japan itself.
- James: Yeah. So you were—
- Frank: We were on a big troop ship headed for Japan. And we were four or five days out on the ship and probably five or six days before we would have gotten to Japan. Those ships don't go very fast, they're not speed boats. And the war ended.
- James: It wasn't that close because the war ended in August.
- Frank: Well, remember, I don't remember how close it was.
- James: I'm trying to tap on [unintelligible].
- Frank: Anyhow, they put us in a big circle, and we circled the ocean for nine days while they decided what the hell to do with us because they didn't want to take us to Japan then. They were worried that big bomb had been dropped and so they ended up taking us to Tsingtao, North China, a shallow water port.
- James: After the war.
- Frank: Yeah. The war was over and we were there to try and corral and round up Japanese that didn't know the war was over.
- James: Right after the war that you were in China?
- Frank: Yes, it was over.
- James: Okay.
- Frank: And to pick up--the purpose was to round up stray Japanese that didn't know the war was over 'cause even though they were in China that didn't mean they wouldn't think the war was still going on. They didn't have no way of knowing. And that China was a crazy place, but I had a good time there.
- James: What city were you at?

Frank: Tsingtao.

James: Oh, okay.

Frank: It's a shallow water port. You couldn't when we went in-- when they took us ashore, they took us ashore in a landing craft because the harbor wasn't—

James: Deep enough for the ship.

Frank: --deep enough for the ship and we went in during the middle of the night. It was coal black, and we were going along in this boat and all of the sudden it went like this. It came to a full stop standing up like this --

James: Oh, my.

Frank: And it turned out there was a big monster rock in the middle of the harbor in the silt, and so when it stopped and we realized that everything was still more or less all right they, guy in charge told--

James: "Back off"

Frank: Told everybody to move to the back end of the boat and we did and it slid—

James: Slid off the rock

Frank: --slid off the rock and then we went on in.

James: Nice.

Frank: But ah, I was in the only boat that went up on the rock. The other guys weren't--

James: Were the Chinese friendly (??) ?

Frank: A lot of them were.

James: Did you find any Japanese soldiers?

Frank: Yes.

James: That you were looking for?

Frank: Mm hmm.

James: How did you convince them the war was over?

Frank: [hand gesture(?)]

James: Missed (??) ?

Frank: Didn't have to shoot 'em.

James: [unintelligible] in the arm or nothing' or we'll shoot ya.

Frank: We didn't have to shoot them. We just had to put a gun on 'em and discourage 'em.

James: You must've made some effort to tell them that the war is over--

Frank: Oh, yeah, yeah. We told them.

James: Had some interpreters come in (??).

Frank: But we had to take them in—

James: Oh, I understand that, but—

Frank --and put them into confinement.

James: I just imagine a lot of Japanese wouldn't believe you.

Frank: Well, they had to believe us simply because we were winners. We were there and had guns and they were there. We were the catchers and they were the catchees.

James: Yeah, I understand. You were carrying weapons--

Frank: Yes, but they didn't—well to begin with they were deserters. They weren't--

James: Oh, oh, you didn't tell me that.

Frank: Well, they were Japanese that--

James: It was not an organized outfit.

Frank: No, no, no. Strays, strays.

James: They were strays.

- Frank: Yeah.
- James: Oh. Japanese soldier strays. Okay. That makes more sense.
- Frank: Well, yeah [laughs].
- James: They were probably hungry (??) [unintelligible].
- Frank: I'm sure they were. But they had strange rules in China. Anybody out after 9:00 pm they didn't ask him anything. They just shot him dead.
- James: Who did?
- Frank: The Chinese government. I think they were the communist regime that took over or something.
- James: They didn't take over until after the war.
- Frank: Well, the war was over.
- James: I mean after the war for the control of China was over.
- Frank: Oh, that war.
- James: 1949, yeah.
- Frank: Well, I don't know how that--
- James: I don't know whether you were with Chiang Kai-shek's nationalists or communists or [unintelligible].
- Frank: But we were required by Marine Corps rules to carry a gun when we went on leave. We were warned we gotta be back in by 9:00 or we'd shot on sight with no questions. So that's how I spent about a year there doing like that, and we lived in a deserted high school on the edge of town and from the downtown area we had to get on this main highway, I think, or main street. It was a long street and at the edge of town it went into a fork. There was a left fork that went up to our high school, about a mile or something, and the right fork went down to the waterfront and once or twice a week they'd find a Marine with his throat cut down there at the waterfront because it was no man's land. And so one night, my buddies—this is not really important, but one night I got into a rickshaw. I could talk Chinese. I was at least good enough—
- James: With some English (??)

- Frank: Good to get by yeah, and I told the guy where I wanted to go and he knew what I said so he [went?] down there me and he took the wrong fork and he went to the right instead of the left. So I didn't say nothing but after he went about a half a city block I pulled the old Colt and cocked, and I guess I cocked it in Chinese because he made the neatest U-turn **[End of Tape 1, Side B]** And came back up and took the correct fork and took me back up to the high school.
- James: Do you think they were robbing our soldiers?
- Frank: Oh, they were taking Marines down there for whatever money they might have with 'em.
- James: That's what I say, robbing 'em.
- Frank: Yeah, yeah, mm hmm. But they were not only robbing 'em, they were killing 'em.
- James: Well, that comes next (??), right.
- Frank: Yeah. They didn't care that they were crooked.
- James: The Chinese were part [unintelligible], too?
- Frank: Yeah. I guess so.
- James: Did you eat in Chinese restaurants in the city or did you just eat your own Marine food?
- Frank: Well, I bet I ate four tons of rice. That's the only thing I could eat. Chinese restaurants are weird. The tables are round, about six or seven feet across and they have a four or five foot lazy susan in the middle of the table. And it is just loaded with miscellaneous different kinds of food. And so we'd just rotate that thing and help yourself as it goes by. But the only thing that I could eat and enjoy is rice.
- James: Oh.
- Frank: They had so much weird stuff that I never became acquainted with it. So I don't know what kind it was but it wasn't to my liking.
- James: Okay. So after a the year in China you were well past discharge time.
- Frank: Well, I had—
- James: Did you do more?

Frank: When my four years were up, I had reupped for, you know, for awhile.

James: A while. When did you reup?

Frank: 1944, I guess.

James: Oh. Then you had to stay in for [unintelligible].

Frank: Well, I reupped for two years. But I didn't reup right away. After my time was up I think it was two or three months later so when I did reup I was— what the hell do they call that? There's a word for it.

James: Reenlist.

Frank: No. I mean when you're not, when your enlistment is up but you haven't reenlisted yet. You're in some kind of no man or never-never land or something.

James: Oh. (??)

Frank: But I stayed there for a couple of months before I reupped. So that, ah, when I got out I had six years. Six years and two months or something. I don't remember the details.

James: Okay.

Frank: But --

James: How did you get home from China?

Frank: On a ship. Slow boat from China.

James: A month, I bet?

Frank: Well, it was a long time, yes. A slow boat.

James: And then, ah, you were discharged from the West Coast and then you took a plane back to Madison.

Frank: That's correct, yes.

James: And now you had to find work?

Frank: Well, yes but I didn't really find work. I was a truck or again I was (??) driving a cab. Some guy got in it and said he sure wished that somebody

would buy his father's business. So I checked into the father's business just for the hell of it and figured he had a nice little cement block building on the west edge of Madison and he was a cabinet maker. So I did buy it.

James: Oh my.

Frank: But I never built a cabinet in my life but um [laughs]. I puttered around and figured out how to do it and established a business known as Creative Wood Products. You probably never heard of it, but it's still there. And that is how I spent quite a few years getting there.

James: Had your own shop.

Frank: Yes.

James: All alone?

Frank: For a long time, yeah.

James: There was no one else in the shop.

Frank: That's correct, yes. And a guy talked-- a plywood salesman from Milwaukee talked me into joining up with him as a partner and going into the plywood business. So I made the cabinet shop office the plywood company office and put up a shed next door to hold plywood. And stayed that way until I decided to get out and retire I guess.

James: The plywood business was good?

Frank: Well yeah, it was pretty good. It wasn't sensational because there was quite a few people in it.

James: Lot of competition, right. Well then did you get married?

Frank: Yes. Well, not right away.

James: Oh.

Frank: I was, ah-- she died about ten years ago, and we were married twenty-seven years. So that would be thirty-seven years, about thirty-seven years ago, that would be when I got married. She was a school teacher in Verona.

James: Mm. hmm. Did you have children?

Frank: No.

James: Okay. She was much older then (??).

Frank: Yes.

James: Okay.

Frank: And she had kids, she taught first grade. She had a room full of ankle biters five days a week and she didn't have any screaming urge to have her own and I didn't either so we got along fine.

James: Did you join any veterans organizations?

Frank: No.

James: I'm interested in that. And did the Marine Corps have a lot of reunions that you went to?

Frank: No, I never went to any.

James: Must have sent you out things in the mail encouraging you to do so.

Frank: I might have gotten some junk mail but I don't remember that.

James: I see. You never had an interest in keeping up, track with your own [old?] fellas?

Frank: That's correct.

James: Several friends?

Frank: Well, the guys that I was really best acquainted with were all killed in the war, you know. The guys that were my friends. I was a jinx I guess [laughs]. They can't ah, --What the hell is that?

James: Telephone.

Frank: Oh. The, ah --.

James: Well, okay sir. I think that probably does it.

Frank: Yup (??)

James: Did you tell me everything we need to know?

Frank: I can't recall anything that jumps out in my memory. I did see a couple of things that weren't related to me. I saw a U.S. Navy Corsair air cross paths with a Navy artillery shell, blew it-- I was just looking at it when "boo"-- blew it into little pieces.

James: One of their own.

Frank: Yeah. One of their own shells, and one of their own airplanes. He was strafing the beach for us, see.

James: Oh.

Frank: And--

James: Never shot a round.

Frank: Yeah. Anyhow, it sure ended his career. See if I can think of anything else. I can't.

James: Well, I'm surprised you had come in, Frank. I really appreciate that.

Frank: Well --

James: And ah ---

[End of interview]