

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
ELTON E. KNUTSON
Rifleman, Marine Corps, World War II.

2004

OH
586

OH
586

Knutson, Elton E. Oral History Interview, 2004.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Elton E. Knutson, an Algoma, Wisconsin native, discusses his Marine Corps service as a rifleman in the Pacific Theater of World War II. Knutson recalls having draft deferment while working for Allis-Chalmers in Milwaukee, on a farm, and in a shipyard, but getting drafted as soon as his deferments ran out. He talks about getting picked for the Marines, boot camp at Parris Island (South Carolina), an infection in his finger while on the train home for leave, and advanced training at Camp Lejeune (North Carolina). Knutson portrays the ride overseas on a troop ship with the 34th Replacement Draft, having Thanksgiving dinner at Pearl Harbor, dumping spoiled canned food overboard at the Marshall Islands, and training on Guam. Assigned to the 3rd Division, he details his participation in the Battle of Iwo Jima: seeing rocket fire, his ship's retreat after being hit by a mortar, going ashore on a Higgins boat, advancing under fire, and doing work for a week on the beach. Knutson speaks of seeing the flag raised on Mount Suribachi, cleaning out pockets of Japanese soldiers, climbing a mountain in the dark, being pinned by sniper fire, and dropping grenades into caves. He tells of a few dumb mistakes fellow Marines survived making, such as taking prisoners without any ammunition. Knutson discusses extensive training on Guam in preparation for the invasion of Japan and going out on parades and long hikes after the war ended. Assigned to Tianjin (China), he tells of managing Japanese work parties as part of his job distributing automotive parts. Knutson touches on the uneasy relations between American troops and Chinese communist troops. After a month of waiting, he mentions having three days of leave in Shanghai and Panama on the way back to the States. He comments on his homecoming and eventually joining the VFW and the Marine Corps League. After his discharge, Knutson recalls having difficulty finding a job and getting unemployment.

Biographical Sketch:

Knutson served in the Marines from 1944 to 1946 and participated in the Battle of Iwo Jima. He eventually settled in Sturgeon Bay (Wisconsin).

Interviewed by Terry MacDonald, 2004

Transcribed by Michelle Kreidler, Wisconsin court reporter, 2008

Checked and corrected by Joan Bruggink, 2011

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011

Interview Transcript:

Terry: This is an interview with Elton Knutson, who served with the United States Marine Corps during World War II. The interview is being conducted at 9:00 a.m. The interview is being conducted at 6045 Knutson Road, Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin on the following date of December 31st, 2004, and the interviewer is Terry MacDonald. Well, Elton, can you describe a little bit about your background and life history before you went into the Marine Corps?

Knutson: Well, I went to Algoma High School and finished high school. Then I went to Marinette Vocational School and I took up machine shop. From there, then I went to Milwaukee and I worked for Allis-Chalmers Supercharger for about a year and a half or a little better—a little better. And then I got deferred all the time from working in a defense plant. Well, then I went to—then I could get deferred by coming home on the farm then. We had the farm then. So I come home on the farm. So then I went—I got a deferment there. Then I worked in a shipyard during the winter and I was supposed to quit by April 15th. Well, before April 15th then I got my papers to go for a physical in Milwaukee.

Terry: How old were you at that time?

Knutson: Oh, I was about twenty-two, I guess. So then—after then, well I couldn't get the deferment on the farm no more, and then I was called up for a physical in June.

Terry: When you were working on the farm was your family here, any brothers and sisters or anything?

Knutson: Yeah, I had four sisters and a brother, so they figured that, well, they had enough here to run the farm and stuff. My brother was here yet; he was younger. So then it was—I had to go then.

Terry: So when you went down to Milwaukee, what happened?

Knutson: Yeah, you mean for a physical? Well then they shipped me out right away. I went to Parris Island.

Terry: But how was it that you got picked in the Marine Corps? You were drafted and can you tell us how you were picked?

Knutson: Well, there was eighty-five of us from around this area, and we went down there and the sergeant, or the guy was—whoever picked—the Marine guy anyway, he had—he wanted twenty volunteers for the Marine Corps. Nobody volunteered, so he just went through the papers and, well, some

he—some he told us stand over there, some he sent back. But then when I got there, well, then he said—he looked at my papers, and he said, “Hold out your hands.” He grabbed a hand, “Congratulations. You’re in the Marine Corps. There is nothing you can do about it.” [laughs]

Terry: So you were shipped out right away then?

Knutson: Yeah. So then we took off and I went to Parris Island.

Terry: Can you describe a little bit of what basic training was in the Marine Corps at that time?

Knutson: Oh, it was—it was hard. I weighed one hundred forty-four pounds when I went in. When I got out of boot camp, I weighed one hundred sixty-eight.

Terry: You gained weight. [laughs]

Knutson: I was in good shape then. So then after that, well, then we got a ten day furlough to go home. And then on the way home, then I had KP. And I got infection in my thumb, and my—my whole hand just swelled up great big, you know. Then when I got to Washington, D.C., well, then the SPs were on there. One guy had told them about me, you know, and then they looked at it and they took me off then, and they—I stopped at—well, I was on the train already, heading for Chicago. Well then they took me off and I went to Cleveland, Ohio. I was in the hospital there five days and I had the infection in my finger, in my hand. It just swelled right up. So I was there five days. Well then they released me. I went home for ten days and I was late going back, you know, but, anyway, they fixed up everything.

Terry: And you went back to Parris Island? Where did you go back to?

Knutson: Camp Lejeune.

Terry: Oh, Camp Lejeune.

Knutson: Yeah. And I was there four weeks.

Terry: Was that—what type of training were you—

Knutson: That was basic—that was advanced training. We had—it’s—well, I don’t know what it was. We just went through the field problems and stuff like that, you know. But then after four weeks, well then they took us on—they boarded us on a train and we went to Camp Pendleton then.

Terry: Was there anybody else from this area that went with you in the Marine Corps at this time or not?

- Knutson: Well, there was a couple of guys from Washington Island; they were there. Well, I don't know guy that had—he used to be head of Petersons, so I can't think of his name, but he died now, but he was there. And, oh, what's this other guy's name? He died, too. Oh, I might think of his name yet, but he was there with us too; they were from Sturgeon Bay. August Schultz was another one from around this area, and then there was some guys from Marinette.
- Terry: Uh-huh. Now, when they got you to Camp Lejeune, what were you doing out there?
- Knutson: We just went to basic training then. And then we went to Camp Pendleton.
- Terry: I'm sorry. I meant Camp Pendleton.
- Knutson: Oh. We were just there a week. We got to this area called Little Tokyo or Little Berlin, and there was just a place for—well, oh, I don't know what to say. We just stayed there a week, and then they shipped us overseas just to get going, I guess, overseas. And then we went to—what's that place down there? San Diego. We boarded a ship there then.
- Terry: Was it a troop ship of some sort?
- Knutson: Yeah. It was an old French ship. I think it was USS Rochambeau or something like that. From there we went to San Francisco. We—it was so rough that day going up there, two days or whatever it took us, I thought the ship was gonna roll over. But then we went to—we sat underneath the Oakland Bridge for three days. Well then we took off for Pearl Harbor, and well, we had escort ships and they had two or three troop ships too, and then—
- Terry: What did you do on board ship during that time? Because it—
- Knutson: Nothing. There was five thousand of us aboard, and we only got two meals a day.
- Terry: So were you basically in line to eat all the time?
- Knutson: No. They just had the meal in the morning and then at night, you know. And we would go up and play cards and shoot the breeze. There was so many of us aboard that we just barely could find room to sit down up on the deck or something. Well then we got to Pearl Harbor. We went way up in there. We could see all the ships that were sunk and everything, and we stayed there for three days.

Terry: What year was it that you went in? I forgot to ask.

Knutson: I went in in '44, and I think November 12th I was on my way overseas. I went June—June 30th, and then November 12th I was on my way overseas. So when we got to Pearl Harbor, I spent fifty-eight days aboard that boat, so—and then we stayed there three days. We had Thanksgiving dinner in Pearl Harbor. Well, then we took off and we went to the Marshall Islands, and there, we stayed there for three weeks.

Terry: Now, for the Marshall Islands, was that for an invasion, or was that just—

Knutson: No.

Terry: —that was already done at that time?

Knutson: Yeah. Why we stayed there, I don't know. If it was because—I don't know if the Battle of Guam was going on yet, and we had to wait until that was secured.

Terry: What division were you assigned to?

Knutson: I was in the 34th Replacement Draft going over. I didn't join the Third Division until we got to Iwo Jima. So we were just the replacement draft. So then we stayed there in the harbor in the Marshall Islands for three weeks, I think, and we didn't do nothing. Well, we had a work order. Marshall Islands, there was only one tree on there; it just was as flat as could be. There was nothing there but a little airport, I guess. We never got ashore anyway. And we had working parties and they had a barge there or something all full of canned goods and all kind of stuff, and they figured it was spoiled, it was starting to rust and stuff. So we had to go over there and punch holes in those cans and throw it over the side and get rid of it, I guess. But then we sneaked a few of those cans home with us back to the ship so we got something extra to eat.

Terry: Uh-huh.

Knutson: So then after we left there, then we went to Guam. And then we had—they had our area all set up. We were way back up in the hills. We had our area all set up. And, well, there we went through our training and everything like that.

Terry: Jungle training, is that what it was that you went into?

Knutson: Well, all kinds—all kinds of stuff. We had live power—live power—or live fire training and stuff like that, and marching and all that stuff.

Terry: What was your job as a—

Knutson: I was just a rifleman.

Terry: Okay.

Knutson: And then—and an assistant BAR man too.

Terry: Meaning, a BAR man being a—

Knutson: B-A-R.

Terry: And what did that stand for?

Knutson: That's an automatic rifle [Browning Automatic Rifle]. That was a little bigger rifle, a bigger gun, you know. A rifle, I should say. It had a bigger magazine. And he had a magazine, and we carried extra ammunition for him too when he needed it. That was more, more or less an automatic gun. Otherwise I just had the M1.

Terry: And what was your rank at that time?

Knutson: PF—PFC. No. I was only a private then. I didn't get to be PFC until after we got back from Iwo. Well, I should have been—should have had it too, but they didn't give much ranks out then, you know. All depends on who you know too, I guess. Well then we had extensive training in Guam then until the time we left for Iwo. Then when we got—we didn't know where we were going or anything until we got aboard ship, then they told us everything: Where we were going, what to expect, and everything else.

Terry: So what actually did they tell you aboard ship? I know they said what to expect, but can you tell us a little bit about what they said?

Knutson: Well, they told us we could get planes flying over, you know, and, well, they seemed to know quite a bit what was going on there. It was heavily fortified and stuff like that. So there wasn't—I don't remember all of that.

Terry: But they expect a battle then—

Knutson: Yeah.

Terry: —when you got on?

Knutson: Yeah. So after we got out a few days, well then we went and pretty soon there was an announcement over the loudspeaker system there, you know. They said the task force is right ahead of us. So we had met with them. We

met up with them at sea. So who—who—where they come from, I don't know if they come from Saipan or if they come from Pearl Harbor or what, but it was the Fourth and Fifth Division anyway.

Terry: And were you able to see—did you go out on deck and see the—what would you see?

Knutson: Well, then the day come when D-day come. Then we could see everything. We were close enough where we could see all those rockets. They shot a whole bunch of rockets all over the area first. Well, then they went in, the Fourth or the Fifth Division, whichever one went in first. Well, we could sit there and watch them all day long. Pretty soon you could see a tank go up there. All at once there's a big explosion over the tank, and the tank stood there the rest of the time. Even when I got ashore the tank was still there yet.

Terry: Was it a massive bombardment from the Navy on the islands prior to the Marines—

Knutson: Well, before they had all those rockets and stuff like that, yeah, but they were dug in so deep that you couldn't—you couldn't get near them at all. And then our ship got hit by a mortar shell when we were sittin' out there. Well, then they—we all were supposed to go down below and the ship took off and went out to sea a little farther then. Well then the next day or so they come back again.

Terry: When they got hit by a mortar shell, did it do any damage to the—

Knutson: No. It hit the guidewires up on top.

Terry: Oh.

Knutson: So then—so then it was—I don't know if one guy got hurt or not. I thought somebody said they did, but I couldn't say for sure. So then, anyway, we stayed there until we were ready to go in. It was so rough that day, and then we had to go over the side, full pack and everything, and drop into the Higgins boat.

Terry: You mean climbing down those nets?

Knutson: Yeah. And you get down there. You were just about ready, you think you were gonna get into the boat, pretty soon it was about thirty, forty feet away from you. The boat would come up, come up part ways and come up. You just waited until it come right up to you, then you dropped in. I don't know. I guess one guy fell over the side. He was kind of clumsy anyway; he could never do things right. But I guess—I guess they fished

him out. He had heavy glasses and he never got injured. But then on the way in after everybody got loaded up, we just rendezvoused, rendezvoused. Well, pretty soon we caught mortar fire—we were on rendezvous. Well, then pretty—then we sneaked in behind a bigger boat, and then they rendezvoused—all the boats that were supposed to—scheduled to go in went in. Then all at once we went in. I am surprised we didn't get pinched. That tank was on there too with us. The tank went off the same time as we did and we just had—just lucky enough that somebody didn't get pinched in the side of the—side going—when that tank got off.

Terry: Did they run you right up on the beach?

Knutson: Yeah. Yeah.

Terry: Were you taking fire then on the beach too at that time?

Knutson: Oh, yeah. But not too much, not too much then. But then we were unloading ammunition and stuff like that, then we caught fire. The mortar shells landed right pretty close to us, so we took cover. I remember one guy, they had this matting down, you know, and this was all ash, you know, and they had this here matting so it could carry up for trucks and stuff, and the sentry was standing there and he was directing 'em; you got red beach, yellow beach, and blue beach, and he's telling you what—where they had to go. Anyway, he had to go to the can or he left. We caught mortar fire, was sittin' behind this tank, you know, for cover. All at once that mortar shell landed and it was only a little ways from me. It landed in the exact spot where he was standing. It was just lucky, he was just gone for a few minutes then. Well, he come back and straightened out that matting and stuff. "Well," he said "mortar shells don't land twice in the same spot." [both laugh] So then I was on the beach, then we were on the beach for, oh, a week or better. And I—and we seen the flag up. The little flag was up. And we were unloading. Well, it wasn't long the flag was down. Well, we still had to unload. And then pretty soon the big flag went up.

Terry: This is on Mount Suribachi?

Knutson: Yeah, yeah. So then we were just on the beach doing working parties, you know, unloading, unloading barges and stuff like that.

Terry: How did they feed you and stuff? Were you eating K-rations or C-rations or something like that?

Knutson: Yeah, just K-rations and stuff. And we found some way to heat up our coffee. I don't know how we did that, but when we got up on the other

end, you know, well then we could stick it in the sulfur bed cracks and you could heat up. So, well, anyway, on shore we were sitting there for a while one time, and all at once this guy—this guy had a nice pillbox all boarded up and sandbags on top. Mortar shell landed right on top. It killed three of ‘em, I guess. I don’t know what happened to the other ones. We were catching mortar fire. It seemed like they had sent three of ‘em, three mortar shells. Well, then it got quiet for a while. Well, things—they had a—Mount Suribachi was already secured then, you know, so we were—I suppose we were catching it from the other end. Then as they needed us up front, well, then we had to go up the northern—to the far end of the island. Well, then we went in. We cleaned up about the last pockets of stuff.

Terry: Some pretty dangerous operations then.

Knutson: Well, yeah. We were in the—we were in the side—well, going up at night, it’s dark. This guy that was in charge of us there, taking us up there, of course, I don’t know what ranks they were. They weren’t much rank then where they got mostly shot off, you know. But anyway, he was in charge. Anyway, it was dark and he followed this CP wire going up, and this guy from—Ted Kohler from New York was there, and him and I and a couple other guys, we carried this stretcher with ammunition on it, and it was heavy, and there was rocks, and we stumbled, and the thing fell down—it fell down, or we tripped and it fell on him and he couldn’t hardly get out of there. Well, then pretty soon that guy that was in charge of us, he had followed that CP wire.

Terry: CP wire, is that some sort of guide wire or something?

Knutson: It was a command post. It was—they always had these here command—well, that’s for the radios and stuff like that, you know.

Terry: Uh-huh. Okay.

Knutson: And, well, he come back and he helped us and got straightened out, but then he lost his CP wire [laughs]. So that’s the only thing we had guidance to get up into where we were supposed to go. I guess he found it because he went ahead and then he came back, and, well, then we had dug in for the night. And then the next day then we were—we were all dug in the line, and this other platoon, they were on the other part. They caught the fire, you know, and we didn’t, but they did. They had, what, twenty-two guys going in that morning, and come the end of the day and they only had seven left. Well, then we were in the line. I dug—we were dug in, the two of us, and we had a little log over us. We could see underneath and that when we want. But, anyway, this guy is supposed to give us information. He come down the line and pretty soon we heard a crack and he got hit.

He dropped in our foxhole. He was lucky he only got hit in the hand. And then he didn't have no first aid kit with him. We had to give him ours. Well, pretty soon we hollered for the corpsman; the corpsman said, "Can he walk?" "Yeah." Well, then he took off and he went up there. Well, we fixed him up while he was there. But if he didn't—if he didn't come or didn't get hit, I wonder if that Jap didn't have an eye on us.

Terry: Because it was a sniper hidden someplace?

Knutson: Yeah. Well, pretty soon the tank come up there, and then they had—he radioed back and he said there's a Jap sitting in the tree over there. And he was right. The tank was right alongside of us; I was sure he was gonna run over us, but anyway, he must of knew we were there. But then he had to wait. They told him, "Well, go ahead and fire," and pretty soon he just opened up on 'em, and he must have got the Jap.

Terry: With a machine gun or a tank-mounted machine gun or did he—

Knutson: Yeah.

Terry: —hit them up with—

Knutson: It was out of the machine gun. He had—I suppose it was a .50 caliber or .30 caliber, whatever they had in there. Well, then pretty soon he opened up on the flamethrower over there, but we didn't know what that was until the end of the day. Well then I found out that when we walked around—we had to relieve those guys. We had to go in and attack the next day. And that's a sight. And here was two Japs laying there burned. They were—all their clothes burned off and their intestines was sticking out, and he was laying there with hands there holding his intestines in. So that's what—that's what they got when they shot that flamethrower.

Terry: They did that kind of—because they were so entrenched in caves and different things?

Knutson: Yeah. You couldn't see them. You had to shoot the whole lot, but you couldn't tell where they were and you just had to—so then that was the last pocket. Well, then we went through the pocket there. Well, then I picked up my rifle. I got a Japanese rifle. I will show you that before you leave. And then—well then after that, well, then there was just patrols and stuff like that. But, anyway, we dug in. And, oh, there was a bunch of dead Japs, *stink*. We couldn't—I couldn't stand it.

Terry: They didn't—they didn't—the Japanese didn't surrender on Iwo Jima. They wouldn't give up, right?

Knutson: No. And then, well, they cleared that off. Well then we just dug in for the night and we dug in different area—well, then we had different areas. But anyway, after we got through there, this here one guy, I think it was Melvin Mead[?] he went back, and then he had—he was shootin'. I guess he shot a few Japs back there, so they must have come out of the cave or something. So then my buddy there—I was assistant BAR man. He had the BAR, my buddy. He was my buddy. And he had a Japanese rifle back over there. I took mine, but he didn't take this, you know. So he wanted them, so he went back and got them. He didn't take a rifle or a thing along, and here—this guy said, "He's shooting some Japs back there." Oh, what a fool he was, you know.

Terry: Took a chance, huh?

Knutson: Well, yeah, you know, never thinking. He thought everything was cleared up, you know. We just went through there. But he was just lucky. Well, then after that we dug in different areas and we were out on night patrol, and while we were on patrol we blew up caves, and well, we captured one guy. One guy surrendered when we were on patrol that time. That went on—

Terry: What was it like to come up on a cave that you knew was occupied by the Japanese?

Knutson: Well, I never knew it was occupied. That one time we went back there, we seen this here cave. We dropped a flare grenade down there. Oh, it just bounced right down. That hole must have—well, it wasn't very big, no more than a guy could crawl down in. And pretty soon it started to burn. We could see that. Well then the sergeant told me here, or the guy that was in charge of us, told me to go back and get some more C2 or—that was explosive—to get some more. They were gonna blow it up. While I was gone, they—it was burning and everything. The guy in charge said, "You better walk away from there," he said, you know, "it might explode." But, anyway, it—everyone walked away and they just blew out of there just like a cannon. If we would have stick our heads in there looking at it we would have blown our heads off. And then it blew—they had the—the one hole was already blocked off down around the bend, you know, and that blew that out too. It blew the whole works out.

Terry: They must have had some pretty powerful stuff in there.

Knutson: They had ammunition and stuff down there. Well, that went on until the end, you know. Then another guy too after we were sitting and everything was secured, you know, and he took a walk. We were down below on this—in a level place there, and then he had a ridge up on top, this here guy, and another foolish mistake the guys made. So he took a walk up

there just looking around. He had his rifle along. No ammunition. Here he come onto this place, here was three Japs in a foxhole up there. They raised their hand up. And here he picked up his rifle, he marched 'em in, but he didn't have ammunition on him. All the foolish mistakes, you know, a guy made. You know, that could have been serious, you know [laughs]. Well, anyway, we got—that's the way it went until the end.

Terry: How long were you on Iwo Jima then?

Knutson: Well, I was there, well, April—let's see. First week in April was Easter. Well—then we come back down along the shore then, and then we could see these planes take off, all these little fighter planes. The airport was fixed up so that they could fly, and these planes would go up and they would circle and circle, and pretty soon they disappeared. Then another bunch of them. But they hit Okinawa that day. We were still on Iwo yet. The next day we left back to Guam.

Terry: For rest and recovery then, is that what?

Knutson: Well, yeah. They had to get the new troops in and fill up our company to full strength, and from then on, well, then we went to—

Terry: Did you have to help evacuate any of the wounded soldiers, Marines? Did you do any of that at all?

Knutson: No.

Terry: They had other people assigned?

Knutson: Yeah. They had their corpsman and they had other guys that took care of them after that if anybody got wounded. Well, I know there was one guy that was in our—my—**[End of Tape One, Side A]**

Terry: We are talking with Elton Knutson about his time on Iwo Jima.

Knutson: Anyway, the guy's on patrol and he was assistant bazooka man, you know. I don't know if you know how bazookas work. It's just a big tube and he's supposed to load it in, and then when it's ready, well, he taps the guy on the shoulder. Well, anyway, they caught fire and they couldn't figure out where it was coming from, but there was a cave over there. He said to his assistant then behind him, he looked and said "I'll see where they are." He stuck his head up, and he got hit right in the back of the head. That's another thing too, you know, the Japs, if they would have moved it a little one way or the other, it wouldn't have been so bad, but they stayed in that same position, you know. Well, anyway, but they shot

at that cave over there, and they—well, then they didn't get no more fires anymore, so that must have been where it came from.

Terry: Uh-huh. So you went to Guam then for some R and R, recovery?

Knutson: Yeah. Then we had extensive training. Then we had really some hard training. We went out on hikes and we had to live—live power—live fire, or different ways of attacking a tank and all that kind of stuff. And that went on for, oh, until September. We went back in April, so September. And then I suppose we were supposed to go into Japan then, I imagine.

Terry: That's what the training was for?

Knutson: Yeah.

Terry: For the invasion—

Knutson: Yeah.

Terry: —eventual invasion of Japan?

Knutson: Yeah. Well, then the war was over.

Terry: Can you tell me what it was like when you heard that the Japanese surrendered? What did the Marines do?

Knutson: Well, we just relaxed. Everything was—well. We still—we still had—after that then we still—we went out on parades then. We had to march, oh five, six miles to the parade field. And, you know, we dressed up, and we had parades, and we went on hikes, and stuff like that. And that was before—yeah, after, I guess, we went on twenty-five mile hikes. *Hot*. Some guys just cashed right in. They couldn't—it was so hot and everything. Those poor guys, you know, that couldn't make it, you know. They had to take it again. Oh, and there was cooks. Some of them were cooks. They weren't in shape, and when they come back, they dropped right in their tracks.

Terry: I wonder why they made them—the war was over, and they made them still do that.

Knutson: Yeah, I don't know. So then—well, that went on until the end of—well, the end of the year then. I don't remember if I told you when we were going overseas then, we were on the ship for fifty-eight days. We had Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's on that ship. Well, anyway, then we were assigned. They split us up. Some went to trucks. Some went someplace else. I was scheduled to go to China. I went to China then. And

we left after—well, after the first of the year. I think I got in China around the 7th of January or something like that. Cold.

Terry: And what was your job, the Marine's job in China?

Knutson: Well, the most—most of the job was—there was unconditional surrender. The Japanese was in Manchuria, so then they had—their job—or our job was to get those Japanese troops back to their homeland. But my job, I was in automotive, so I—we got parts from Pearl Harbor, and then we had to issue them out to the garages so that—for their trucks and stuff like that. So I was in automotive, until we got enough points, you know, to go home.

Terry: How did the Japanese soldiers look at you—at the Marines at that time in China?

Knutson: Well, we had working parties. We had boxes and stuff like that to open up. We had Japanese working parties. And they were real good. They opened up the boxes, and we had marked them down. We told them—they couldn't talk—I mean, they could understand us, but when they wanted to count the parts, all they did was lift their fingers up, you know, five, ten, twelve. There are twelve parts—twelve parts in there. Well, then we would mark it down and put it on shelves. But they were—they were pretty good.

Terry: And so how long did you have to stay in China?

Knutson: I was there until July.

Terry: This time was your whole division, or whatever outfit you were assigned to, all went together there?

Knutson: Yeah. Then, of course, we were all split up then. I don't know what—I can't remember now if we were still—I suppose we were still in the Third Division. But anyway, I was scheduled to go home in April. I had enough points. We sat all day just waiting and waiting for orders to get there. Six o'clock come, no room on the boat or something, or no boat. So then we had to unpack, and then we got—and then I was transferred to Third Amphib Corps, and I was in the garage. So then we were—or in the parts department, like. Well, then pretty soon that broke up. Well then pretty soon we got waiting, and we got stuck up on the third floor in this building. I guess we were there a month just about. We didn't do nothing. Not a thing. We went downstairs to eat and we went right back up again. There must have been about, seven, eight of us guys. Tell stories and—

Terry: At least you had a barracks where you had beds in it.

Knutson: Yeah.

Knutson: Yeah.

Terry: Versus sleeping on the beaches or whatever.

Knutson: Yeah. So then we—I thought maybe they forgot about us, but they didn't. Well, finally then we boarded the ship. And I was in Tientsin [a.k.a. Tianjin], China. That's up about thirty-five miles up the river there. We were only about thirty-five miles from Peking, so—I never got up there. Some guys did, but I didn't get up there.

Terry: Did you have free rein when you—could you go wherever you wanted in China?

Knutson: Somewhat, yeah. But the Chinese, they were gettin' kind of strong then, and they had the communists, and you couldn't trust them at all. Well, I know one guy had—this Chinese had this here Marine backed up against a wall there and he had his rifle on him. He was all alone. And anyway, these MPs had come along with the Jeep. They stopped, and "What's the matter?" they said. "I don't know." He don't know why they're holding him. Anyway, he talked to [unintelligible] and he says, "You'd help a buddy out, wouldn't you?" So he went and he talked to the Chinese, and he hauled off and he nailed him, a guy, this Chinese soldier. And I don't know if they took his rifle and threw it way, jumped in the jeep, and away they went. Well, some reason or why—why they held him, I don't know. But he didn't know. Just walking along the street, you know. Chinese communists, you know, they were radical guys. And then some of these guys that went to Peking, they come back and they got stopped by Chinese communist troops, you know. And I don't know, some guys got in jail too. Well, then they had a hassle to get them out of there too. Well, that kept on until we went—until we left for—to go home.

Terry: So what kind of ship did they put you on to transfer you out of China?

Knutson: It was a ship that was built on the west coast. They—they made those ships in a hurry, you know.

Terry: A Liberty ship or a Victory ship or something like that?

Knutson: Yeah. And from Tientsin, we went to Taku. That was the base on the—in the harbor. And then we went to Shanghai. We were there three days. We had liberty in Shanghai. That was a good time. Come in there, they had a ramp going down to the boat. You walked down. You could—you walked down. You come back, back again after you got into Shang—we went into

Shanghai, partied, you know; and stuff like that. Coming back then, you had to walk up to the boat. The tide went out that much; I was surprised. I bet you went down thirty, forty feet. So then we left Shanghai. Then we took all the way—we went to whatchacallit, the crow—crow flies. We went all over there, up around Wake, and then all the way down the coast. We went down through Panama Canal and we had liberty in Panama Canal. We stayed there three days. That was the same thing there. They had to wait until the tide come in or out or something before we could go through the locks. And then we went to Norfolk, Virginia, and well, within a week we were discharged.

Terry: You were able to get out then, huh?

Knutson: Yeah.

Terry: So when you got to Norfolk, this was in what? What year was this, '46?

Knutson: Forty-six, yeah. See, it must have been August of '46 then because I was discharged the 9th.

Terry: When you were over there, did you run into any USO shows or anything like that, any entertainment?

Knutson: Well, one time they had—in Guam they had these Guam—Guamene [Guamanian?] girls, you know, and they were—had their dance or whatever it was, but that's the only time. I never—I never went to the USO and Red Cross or whatever. I never went there, but some of those guys, they took advantage of that, but I never did. I never got involved in that. I didn't even know where they were. But some guys, they seemed to find out everything, you know. They know where everything is going on.

Terry: Okay. When you got home then or when you got in Norfolk and you were discharged, how did the Americans treat you in the United States?

Knutson: Well, not—

Terry: I mean, because it was probably a little bit of time after the war had ended.

Knutson: Yeah. Yeah. Well, I didn't think they—you would walk the street and nobody said nothing, and the same way when I got home here. Hardly anybody ever said anything, I mean about it. I just did my—come home and started to go to work here and—

Terry: Then when you came home then, did you join any veterans organizations?

- Knutson: No, I didn't join no veterans organizations for quite a few years afterwards. But I joined the VFW. Well, then here a year or so ago then I joined the Marine Corps League.
- Terry: Were you awarded any medals when you were in the service?
- Knutson: No. We couldn't—we had a physical. We could have if we wanted to stay in Norfolk, Virginia where we got discharged. I don't know if I would have got—been able to get the Purple Heart or not then. But they were in a hurry to get out of there, most of the guys, they never bothered with that. They just took off and they got to go home as quick as they could, I guess.
- Terry: So what was your final rank when you got out?
- Knutson: They discharged me as a Corporal then.
- Terry: Okay. Did you keep in touch with any of the Marine Corps friends you made?
- Knutson: No, I haven't. I'm sorry I didn't. I did there for a while, but my buddy there in North Carolina, I wished I would have kept in contact with him. He sent me a Christmas card and I didn't answer him, and I didn't keep in contact with none of them.
- Terry: Can you tell us just a little bit about—looking back your time in the war and stuff, what were your feelings about spending that time overseas and fighting in the war?
- Knutson: Well, it was just a job, I guess. I mean, I didn't think too much of it. I'm glad I got through it as good as I did. And we just had to follow orders and do what they said, and it never bothered me that much. It was good experience. I'm not sorry I got in the Marine Corps, for that matter, because you had good training and everything like that. So it worked out good.
- Terry: Did you use any benefits you received, the GI benefits?
- Knutson: I never got nothing. I had a hard time to get unemployment. I went down to get unemployment, and the shipyard was closed up, and there was no work around here hardly. And then this guy at the employment officer there—unemployment officer, well he think he had to take the money out of his pocket, I guess. Argue! He argued with every one of us veterans that come in there, not getting a job and all this and that. There was no jobs around here. And, well, that went on for a while. Well then finally I got a job hauling milk and I worked part-time. It was only a part-time job, and I just gave up on trying to get unemployment. Otherwise, that's all I ever

got. I never tried to get anything else. Not until lately here now I went to the veterans office—to the veterans hospital for a physical. That's the first physical I had, I guess, or the second one. And then now I went down for that colon check.

Terry: Now you mentioned just briefly that you joined the Marine Corps League here in Door County.

Knutson: Yeah.

Terry: And you joined it recently because that more or less just started up here in Door County, is that correct?

Knutson: Yeah.

Terry: And have you got to a couple of their meetings or dinners?

Knutson: Yeah, I went to a couple of them, I guess. Wilford had a farm over here, you know, in [unintelligible].

Terry: Wilford?

Knutson: Teecore[?]. And he—he was just a young guy when I come home. Well, I knew him.

Terry: And he was a Marine too?

Knutson: Yeah. He joined the Marines after he was old enough, I guess. And, well, then he talked me into joining the League, so otherwise that's all I—

Terry: Is there anything else you'd like to mention about your time in the service during World War II?

Knutson: Well, nothing too much. It was just a job to do, and it was a good thing that they were able to defeat the Japanese, otherwise I don't know what would have happened to this country.

Terry: Okay. I think that's pretty good.

[End of Interview]