

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
WILLIAM LEMKE JR.
Rifleman, 5th Division, Marine Corps, World War II
2003

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Lemke, William, Jr., (1927?-). Oral History Interview, 2003.

User Copy: 3 sound cassettes (ca. 170 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 170 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

William Lemke, Jr., a Fond du Lac, Wisconsin native, describes his World War II service in the Marine Corps, including his experiences at the Battle of Iwo Jima. Lemke talks about signing up with the Marines at age seventeen. After basic training at Camp Pendleton (California), he explains his uncle died during his ten-day furlough so Lemke got an extension, but no record of the extension could be found upon his return so he got five days confinement for being Absent Over Leave. He details his time in confinement and guard duty, and he says some people were taken aboard ship with shackles on, while dangerous guys had white paint on their shirts. Sent to the 27th Replacement Draft, Lemke describes fire team training with Browning Automatic Rifles and the marksmanship test. He speaks of everyone being seasick on a stormy ride to Hawaii and training conditions and exercises at Camp Tarawa. Lemke mentions tricks the soldiers learned such as sucking on rocks when thirsty and soaking shoes overnight to make them comfortable. He talks of seeing a doctor named Jungle Jim for jock itch and a sprained ankle. Lemke mentions training on Higgins boats and the Marines' setting a speed record loading three ships to take to Iwo Jima. While loading the ships, he tells how he almost lost a finger when his ring got caught on some cables. He describes Christmas on a rainy beach eating burned stew. Lemke mentions stopping in Saipan, getting hit in the hand while climbing up a cargo net, seeing a B-29 explode in the air, and drying off wet gear in the ship hold. He describes the difficulties of landing on Iwo Jima to join the 5th Division. He talks about incoming shells, digging foxholes, and being a replacement stretcher bearer. Lemke compares Marine tactics of immediate assault and shooting straight ahead with Army tactics. He expresses disdain for National Guard outfits. Lemke analyzes the Japanese soldiers' use of tunnels and pillboxes. He emphasizes the Marines' high casualty rate and says the battle was "a matter of attrition all the way through." He describes in detail combat situations on Iwo Jima. He tells of the difficulty digging foxholes in hot volcanic rock, losing officers to snipers, and tanks being unable to get over the ridges. Lemke claims he was lucky being small because snipers targeted bigger soldiers. He describes a feeling of unreality and says his leg would be black and blue from trying to pinch himself awake. He recounts near-death situations, including once when he thought he actually had died, and he comments on young privates who were killed by diving on grenades. He tells detailed stories of several people he served with who were killed there (Eagle, Leitner, Martinez, Bill Hurt). Lemke talks about beer in the camp and going on leave to Parker Ranch (Hawaii). He portrays digging a foxhole in a field and finding a mass grave of Japanese soldiers, and he talks about what the Americans did with their unexpectedly large number of dead. Lemke discusses being pulled off the front line and sent to an Army hospital. He speaks of leaving for Japan on

V-J Day and his nine months there with the 2nd Division blowing up naval guns, checking schools, and being on guard duty. He describes a sergeant who specialized in knife fighting. Lemke describes a Japanese sword he took on Iwo Jima. After returning to the States, he mentions finishing high school and training to be a mason. Lemke claims Iwo Jima was worth it, but could have been done differently, and he analyzes the Air Force lives and resources it saved.

Interviewed by Bruce Tessner, 2003.

Draft transcript, 2003.

Typed into electronic format by Jeff Javid, 2008.

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2009.

Interview Transcript:

Bruce Tessner: We'll try to follow a timeline, but for the most part, we'll be flexible and informal.

Bill Lemke joined the United States Marine Corps in 1944 at the age of 17. In February of 1945 he took part in the invasion of Iwo Jima, the single most savage and bloody battle in Marine Corps history. This is his story.

Bill, why don't you tell us about your life before you joined the Marine Corps, at least the year or so before you went into the Marine Corps.

Bill Lemke: Well, the year before I chummed around—most the people I chummed around with were older than I was and they were all in the service. Like, for instance, the class that I came out of Cleveland school with; there was eight people in there, four boys and four girls. So that was small right there, that generation.

Well, anyway, nobody to hang around with really and you just felt lost, and I decided to join the Marine Corps. My brother was in the Army and I figured well, being in the Marine Corps—I didn't want to be in the Army and I didn't want to be in the Navy, and I thought that would be better, which, I mean. And, anyway, I joined up with another kid that I used to play ball with, Arnie Martin, and we went down there together and joined up and went in. And, actually, the last year I quit school. I was supposed to go in my senior year but I didn't; and I talked to a guy and he says, what do you want to be in the Marine Corps, and I said I'd like to be—I was fascinated by guns and everything; I'd like to be armor or something like that, like your dad was.

Bruce Tessner: Yeah.

Bill Lemke: And I thought that would be a good deal: you work on guns and everything; later on in life maybe get to be a gunsmith or something, you know, that would be leading up to something.

Bruce Tessner: Sure.

Bill Lemke: Well, anyway, I says—you'll have to, you can't just quit school, you'll have to go to vocational school; so, he says, take up machine shop there and everything and that will give you a good basis for getting in there.

So that's what I did. I went until I was called up and that. And I had about almost a year at vocational school that I spent there. And, I got good grades there and everything because it seemed I was handy at that stuff.

So anyway, I got called up, but in the Marine Corps it was just, they called it, TS, tough shit—FMF, Fleet Marine Force. All the armorers in the Marine Corps were five and six gunnies that had—they were in for twenty years. They didn't want any young kids; and that was all plumb jobs, you know. The young guys they wanted for snoop 'em and poop 'em, Mud Marines—so, that's where I went in, in there.

Bruce Tessner: So you were in vocational school for a year then?

Bill Lemke: For a year.

Bruce Tessner: Before you went in. So when did you ship out for boot camp?

Bill Lemke: It was—like I think it was in August in '44.

Bruce Tessner: '44.

Bill Lemke: Yeah.

Bruce Tessner: And when you joined, was there a recruiting depot in Fond du Lac or something like that, was that where you signed up basically?

Bill Lemke: You have to go down to Milwaukee.

Bruce Tessner: Milwaukee, sure. You took a physical there and everything.

Bill Lemke: Right.

Bruce Tessner: Did you leave directly from Milwaukee for boot camp or did you come back—

Bill Lemke: No, there was a delay in there, see. They didn't call you up right away.

Now, the kid that I joined up with, he was sent to Camp Lejune and I was sent to San Diego, California. That just showed you how it worked, you know, at that time.

Bruce Tessner: Yeah, okay, he would have went to Paris Island.

Bill Lemke: Paris Island, right.

Bruce Tessner: Sure.

Bill Lemke: So anyway, here's the deal. I went in and spent boot camp in there. And then you had what they called a ten-day furlough transfer. They'd give you ten days to go from San Diego to Fond du Lac and then you had to be back on the tenth day.

Well, to begin with, when we went into—we left Milwaukee and then down to Chicago to go to boot camp on—

Bruce Tessner: You took a train I assume.

Bill Lemke: You took a train. But they had four or five regular troop transports, you know, they're troop cars.

Bruce Tessner: Sure.

Bill Lemke: They were rougher than hell; they were like from World War I, you know. They hooked those on, any train that was going they'd hook you on the back train or anything. And with that group, we took the southern route. We went down south and through Texas and went that way.

When I came home on the furlough on that transfer, we came, on that one, came right across. No, on that one I went on the northern route, got hooked up in the north and they sent us around. But that was a regular train. But there was so much train traffic at that time that they just put you on anything that was running from coast to coast. So that's okay, I got home. Really, we went on the northern route, that took longer than that direct shot, see.

Bruce Tessner: I had a couple questions about prior to that. Did you know any of your buddies who went into the Marine Corps prior to that?

Bill Lemke: No, I had no idea. The only kid I knew, Trainer[?], was when I joined up with, and I say he went to—and I don't even know if he went that same time as I did or not, they just call you up.

Bruce Tessner: The other question I had: I was curious about your parents. They had to sign, didn't they?

Bill Lemke: Oh, yeah.

Bruce Tessner: And were they reluctant?

Bill Lemke: They were reluctant; they didn't want to sign.

Bruce Tessner: But Marv, your brother, was already in the Army.

Bill Lemke: He was drafted right away out of high school. He like graduated now, a week after his graduation he was called up.

But, he was lucky. He would have been in there when it was really rough. To begin with, he went in Signal Corps. He had a good IQ and everything. He went in the Signal Corps and from the signal corps they put them in the Tank, at that time he went in Tank. And then they took him out; he had a good officer, and the officer said to him one day, why don't you—he said, you've got a high enough IQ or whatever, he said, get in the Air Corps. He said, the Tanks, he said, isn't a good place to be. So, he got in the Air Corps then, and he went to Rock Island, Illinois; he had like a year or two of college down there. Then they sent him down to Texas for airplane and he washed out at the time because by the time he was going through this deal, they were in North Africa fighting and they go back through the things—he still would have been in the Air Corps and maybe he wouldn't have been a pilot, he'd maybe been a copilot or a navigator or something; like, for a pursuit pilot, he wasn't good enough.

Well, anyway, that lull in between there they got the hell shot out of the Army; they'd go back through the records, this guy was in the Air Corps, Signal Corps; put them back in the Tanks. And he was sent out in Tank. He ended up with Patton's Army. But at the same time, if he had been in North Africa, they got the shit shot out of them. Those Sherman tanks—they were like tin cans, you know.

Bruce Tessner: Well, then, you were on a train; you got to boot camp. Anything you want to tell us about boot camp? I know it was rough, everybody knows that.

Bill Lemke: It was rough, but I expected that. Where we lived down there, we lived a rough life. It wasn't that bad to me, so.

But then, coming home from boot camp, I was going to tell you, actually, I would have been had two and a half days home, that was in September. And, boy, oh boy, that was—my Uncle Herman that lived aside of us, he died, you know right when I was home. And my folks—I used to plant potatoes for him and

everything. So, my mother, especially, she said, I'll call up the Red Cross and that and your uncle died—see if you can't get a three-day extension to go to the funeral.

Gets back; gets on the train in Milwaukee; the minute you get on the train they had SP's on the train I had; SP, he was a sailor you know.

Bruce Tessner: Shore patrol.

Bill Lemke: Yeah. And I went up and told him, I said I need traveler's orders, I said, I'm three days over. Sure, he said, you know. I told him about that. He writes out an order: this man is going back to the thing and he reported to me. No other SP. Just like orders, they can't touch you then until you get back.

Well, at the time there's maybe three training battalions on the West Coast—27th, 31st and 34th, you know. Everybody's out on ten-day furlough transfers, the officers aren't even there, everybody's off. So, this telegram comes in there saying that I'm going to be, and the Red Cross okayed it, you know, the telegram come in there, where the hell would they send it, they don't even know what outfit— (blank part of the tape)

—said have you got record of the telegram, you know, who in the hell. I said no, no. He said I've got to take your word for it, he said. And, he said, if I did word all of you characters coming in here with sad stories, he said, well. He said, I'll tell you, you're going to be in the Marine Corps a while, and he said, I don't want you to get in trouble anymore, he said, I'm going to give you five-days confinement. It isn't going to be—like they call a deck court-martial, he said, you go here, put a guard—there was other guys there, put a guard on us, send us out in the boondocks. There they've got a group of tents, barbwire around, they didn't have any (inaudible) put a double barbwire fence. And there you go. Take off your uniform. They give you fatigues, you know, top and bottom; no underwear; two shoes, without strings in them; then they give you three shoestrings this long, once for each shoe and one for your belt to pull on. And then on the back of this thing is written a number. Mine was 556 in red letters across there, 556 was my number. And, then, there you are.

So, the first day you're in there there's a lot of guys—boy, they're tough cookies—they were in two, three campaigns, and they don't want to go out there anymore, you know what I mean. And then they had in there summary court-martials, and then like these deck

court-martials [for minor offenses]. See, the court-martial I had wasn't really a court-martial, it was just the officer, no hearing or anything, you know. So, that's okay. There you are.

So my job with another guy—to begin with, in the morning they'd get you up at 4:30, and there was four guys to a tent, roll-up sides; and then they had a plywood floor in there, and they had four cots in there, one blanket for each cot, and there you were. Every morning, 4:30, first thing, you get up you'd take your cot, fold it up, roll up your blanket, put all the cots in the corner, you know. Then you go out for roll call; they call it. One morning they might call out "Lemke!", and you'd holler "556!", if he said, otherwise he might say "556!", and then you holler, "Lemke!", you know; they'd pull crap like that. Every time you come near any of the guards around there—a lot of them were just PFC's and corporals—you put your hands like this. If you came within, like, Three, four feet of them, you'd have to walk by them with your pants up like that so you wouldn't hit them or anything like that. But, that's—call everybody "Sir," you don't talk until you're talked to.

Well, anyway, at 4:30 you pull that up; then they'd march you over to the showers, cold shower, march you through there, and then you go and get something to eat. After that, like it would be 6 o'clock then, two guys and a guy with a rising machine gun would go with you, two guys; then you'd have a big pith helmet painted bright yellow 556 on there. And then my job for the next few days I was there, going with the garbage truck—two of us. One guy'd get up on the truck and he'd dump her; and this guy with the rising is there all the time, now he says: I'll just tell you, don't ever let anybody get in between you two guys and me, he says, because if that happens I have a right to—I'll take my safety off, and, he says, I even have a right to shoot if I want to. And he said, another thing he said, I don't know what you're in here for or how long, but, he said, if I lose one of you people—they always call you "people"—if I lose one of you people, I've got to serve your time. That's the way—I mean, boy, they stuck close to you.

Well, anyway, I forgot to tell you, in the morning, while you're going to get your shower and that, they had like one guard for our row of tents there; they have a big galvanized pail full of sand and there was three buckets of water you had to put there outside the tent. He'd go and he'd take that bucket of sand and throw it all over on that floor there. And then, when you came back, the sand was all over the floor; each one had a scrub brush like this, take the water, they'd throw a couple buckets of water: scrub her clean,

boys, every morning. Those floors in there was just like this, that's how clean they were.

Well, anyway, I was in there like the five days, and then I got out of there. That captain said, I don't want to ever have you get any real trouble, he said, this will teach you a lesson. He said, when the Corps tells you to do something, you do it.

Bruce Tessner: Now, this was at Camp Pendleton?

Bill Lemke: That was at Camp Pendleton.

So, then from there I was sent over to the 27th Replacement Draft. That was a battalion that were training, and you start your training in that company. The only thing there—I never got any liberty because you were a jail bird, they call you. Every time you come up for liberty, you got guard duty. And, the ironic part of it is, each battalion had, like, one tent where they had barbed wire around there, just single barbed wire where they just kept the drunks and stuff like that would come over weekends, here I had a guard place and here's one of the guys that I was in there before. They were keeping him in because he jumped a couple of times, went. And they'd take them aboard ship with shackles on, heavy shackles. And then the shackles they wouldn't take off until they were about five miles out—then they'd leave them go. But, otherwise, they were shackled aboard.

And, I tell you, at this camp we didn't have any murderers or anything, but then the guys that were summary court-martials that they maybe hit the officer or something like that, they were painted with white paint on their shirts and that. They were a little worse, you know. So that was that, period.

Then, went through the training. And they trained you—in the Marine Corps they train you four men in a fire team. And, when one guy went to shit, everybody went—that's the way they train you to get you to be that way. And in the Marine Corps they had like there was three men, three guys, and one was a Browning automatic rifle, the other three, and one was supposed to—there were three groups of four in a squad and there were three squads. Anyway, the platoon was about forty-nine guys in there.

And, the company, like when we landed on Iwo, that was a reinforced company with about 240 in there, but we had—there was what they call a mortar platoon, and a machine gun platoon—they weren't very, but they had their machine, and they were all

right with the company all the time. But then, they had what they call heavy weapons company was attached to you all the time—there were flame throwers and 37 millimeter guns, stuff like that. They were specialists in their field, you know. And, maybe, in there there would be a couple of demolition men too because you needed a lot of them in the Pacific, so.

Bruce Tessner: But you were basically then—

Bill Lemke: I was just a rifleman to start out with.

Bruce Tessner: Were you officially at this time a part of a, what should I say, a designated part of the Fifth Division?

Bill Lemke: We were part of the Fifth Division, but we were a replacement battalion attached. We weren't—the only time we became part of the Fifth Division, like the company I ended up with, Charlie Company, 27th Marines, was when we were in, landed on Iwo, we were still—I'll tell you later about that.

And then officially until you were right in there, I wasn't part of that regiment.

Bruce Tessner: On this outfit that you started with here, this replacement, was it a battalion, you said, a replacement battalion?

Bill Lemke: Yeah.

Bruce Tessner: How many guys in it do you remember had been in action before?

Bill Lemke: Oh, they were real good about that. The way the Marine Corps operated, they'd have an operation like the First Division on Guadalcanal, and they had paratroopers that were on Guadalcanal and that. And they developed another division, when the Second Division there was a lot of guys from there, they'd be the key men. They were the survivors of that. The Second Division when they were in Turola [Tarawa?], a lot of those guys—every new division they'd take the cream of the crop and put them in there and they were the guys that would teach you and everything like that, all the tricks and everything. And that's the way it went. By the time the Fifth Division come, we had paratroopers, we had ex-First Division men. Most of these guys were in the mortar and machine gun platoons. That takes the most skill. And they were good at it, you know what I mean.

Like there was one guy in the mortar platoon there; five campaigns he had, you know. They knew what they were doing.

And then, as far as like when you went through boot camp and everything like that, all they emphasize mostly was marksmanship and that. They just pounded it into you. There'd be maybe a week on end they had places where they had like a little ravine, like, in San Diego, there in Camp Pendleton, and they'd have on the other side targets and that and then they had like steps like that where you shoot. But this was all day shooting. One guy, you'd sit there with your rifle and you had to strap in and everything, and you'd aim at the target; and the other guy, he'd put one of these bandoleer, cloth bandoleer that you carry shells with, and he'd set there wrapped around and he'd hit the bolt, hit the bolt like that. Then, every time he hit the bolt, you aim, bang, then he'd hit it, bang, bang. Dry shooting like that for maybe a week before you even had any live ammunition. And you'd go through all the positions. You had so many shots offhand, then you'd go to kneeling, sitting, and prone. Prone was the one where you shot sixteen—you had to shoot sixteen rounds in so many seconds: that's two loadings.

Well, and if you qualified for that, like out of 340 if you got a hit like 285, then you qualified. And, as a rule, they didn't want anybody in there that couldn't qualify. A lot of the guys that were below that they'd make cooks and stuff out of them.

But, to be a marksman—or I mean an expert, you had to hit 310, and I hit 305. That's put you in the category of a sharpshooter. And the reason really I should have been better, I had enough experience with guns and that; but I went down—see you'd stand up, they'd blow a whistle and you'd go down on the prone and then your target goes up and then you've got to get these sixteen rounds off in, like, a minute and a half, or something. And, I was so worried about getting all my—because as soon as that time was up, the target would go down; if you had shells left, it didn't do any good. But, I wanted to make sure I got the sixteen rounds in there. And, as a rule, when you went down the first time, and then you shot like that, all your hits would be like in the—it would be like a scatter—it would be like you'd shoot a shotgun. And I kind of went down, and I went to one side and that's where I lost some. If I'd been over more on the target the first time I opened up, I'd have been okay, but I was a little to one side.

Anyway, that paid \$3 a month extra, being a sharpshooter. And, for being an expert, you got \$5 a month. That's the way they worked the incentive for—well, you had the weapons training there, they strived on that.

Actually, the Marine Corps was kind of patterned after the German Army; if you go back, they kind of patterned after the German Army. The Army in this country, they worked on the floor ^ ?? of the box deal, that's the way their operations was. I don't know how their battalion, maybe four battalions. The Marine Corps three, all of its triangular, every time there was two regiments in line there was one regiment in reserve. And then, if there was a breakthrough or anything, that regiment—and the companies tried to do that too, the companies they tried to put two platoons in and keep one platoon back like where the headquarters was right behind the lines in case, unless the line was too wide, you know, then they'd put them in there. But they worked on that. It was like a spring deal, two one. And, then, two divisions—see, there was three divisions finally that went in to—actually, the Third Division should have never landed on Iwo Jima. They were supposed to be held for a reserve on Okinawa because this three-day deal was going to go and then they were just there in case, and good thing they were. They ended up, I believe, out of their three regiments, their three Marine Corps, they put two in there and they got the shit shot out of them too.

Bruce Tessner:

So after Pendleton, then where did you go?

Bill Lemke:

Then Pendleton, we went to Hawaii, because that's where the Fifth Division; they were up on, like, the mountain, low mountain, Mauna Loa there, there was a big, what they called dust bowl; that was their training place, they called it Camp Tarawa. The Army had a camp there one time, and they abandoned it; they said it was too rough and that up there. All it was, was tents and that in there.

And, the way the training deal went, you'd be in the field ten days and then you got three days off, so. And you were living outside all the time, marching and going. And, like in the training, I'll tell you about Camp Pendleton; they had one officer, and these were guys that knew what they were doing. To begin with: marches and everything like that; two canteens of water, and they're supposed to last you all day. California's pretty warm. And, that's where this guy says, I like the feather merchants, he says, they don't have any foot trouble, and he said, they aren't begging for water all day. Hey, smaller guy, you don't need that much. And, you're used to getting kicked around a little more—some of these guys they were football players and everything like that, you never heard such whining in your life.

Well, anyway, you pick up two, three—get yourself two, three nice clean stones and put them in your pocket. When you get thirsty you put one in your mouth and it gives you saliva, that's one trick. And were always on rations. Your rations, you get like the, you get—I think it was a K—you get a pack of four cigarettes in there, some hard candy, little bitty deal like that of cheese or meat and some crackers and what else. Oh, and then there was gum in there. And then they'd be two or three pieces of toilet paper, brown toilet paper, in there. The toilet paper—the first thing you'd do, you'd take your hat off, your cap off **[End tape 1 side A]**

Bill Lemke: your helmet; and with your fiber liner in between there, there's webbing, that's where you'd keep the toilet paper because it would keep it dry. If you'd put in your pocket, you're sweating—you'd throw it away, you know. A lot of guys they'd keep their cigarettes up in there too. That's all tricks, see.

And then, all the bandoleers had safety pins on them that you carry. The safety pin you always take and you hook it on there. When you're snooping and pooping [the act of reconnaissance] your holes all over, or your buttons, safety pins, you go always use them, all the tricks like that.

Then the company commander would say everybody put on their new shoes. You always had like two they call them boon dockers, two pairs, one new pair, and then as you wore them out, but you's always have one new pair behind, Put on your new shoes. Take you out on like a ten, fifteen-mile hike. The first thing you'd do, march you down the God damn creek, water up to your knees. And then the rest of the day you're going marching, marching, marching. Hey, they were like split-hide shoes and they had a cork bottom and everything, but you'd get those shoes all wet and you march like that, and the shoe during the war would form to your foot. Never had any foot trouble, that guy.

A lot of officers weren't that smart. Later on I'd always take my shoes, nothing else; I'd put them in a pail of water overnight if I knew we were going to march and I put them on the next day. Never had any trouble. And see, that's all tricks of the trade the older ones that'll teach you. So.

Bruce Tessner: Then you were at Hawaii and there were much training there I assume.

Bill Lemke: Yeah, we had training right along, but not with the Fifth Division. The Fifth Division, when we were first in Hawaii, we stayed down

near the beach. Down there they had a camp, they were all made out of corrugated tin for a roof and then about three foot around the roof, the roof had a big overhang; all it was was screen; there were barracks like that, there were maybe about twelve guys in there, you know, and they were set off the ground quite a ways. And because it would rain there every fifteen minutes where we were near the post. And then you'd go out on snooping and pooping and stuff like that. But in Hawaii, you'd get in these places where lava beds and a week and a half, two weeks you'd wear your shoes, the soles would wear right off them—that was so tough on the shoes.

Bruce Tessner: Did you make any practice landings while you were in Hawaii?

Bill Lemke: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah.

Bruce Tessner: With the regular Higgins boats, or landing craft?

Bill Lemke: Oh, yeah, mostly with the regular Higgins boat. The top notch guys that were going to land, they had these tractors and alligators, and the Higgins boat come most of the time until after Iwo; then all we landed with were Higgins boats, you know.

And that was a rough deal too. A lot of times it would be rough and you get waves, say eight, ten feet, you know, which isn't bad, they'd still go. Higgins boats, they'd put over and then we always had cargo nets that you'd come down.

Yes, anyway, the first guys down the cargo net, and usually these small guys that could get down in a hurry, and I was one that would; and you'd get down in there and then she's coming up all the time and pounding against the thing. So, what the first guys down on there do—you keep the net as tight as you can so that if he feels any slack in there; he thinks the boat's coming up and they'll just drop back, you know. Usually, you had your rifle slung across just one side because if you went in the drink you'd throw the rifle off, otherwise you'd go right down to the bottom. Which you would most likely anyway because you had about forty pounds on you. We'd always go with a full pack. Because you'd make a landing—like [other?] Maui we used to land a lot of times. Because Maui, the approaches there were a lot like the sandy beaches on Iwo. And you'd make a landing there and then you're going to be there three, four days. They'd have some shooting exercises for you there, and of course you dig holes and that like you're, you know, and everything like that, sleep on the ground. So, that's the way it went.

Bruce Tessner: Then, after Hawaii you hopped—tell us about the boat trip.

Bill Lemke: Oh, I've got to tell you about the first boat trip from California to Hawaii.

Oh, we went, and it was like in mid-September, early November when we went; anyway, I forget the exact. But, we're going to Hawaii. Gets aboard this ship. The name of it was *Dakota* [*Elgoin?*]*—*that was a Dutch ship. It had Dutch crew. American gun crews on there, because they had like five-inch guns on each end, and then all the people that worked in the kitchen they were Javanese. And the Dutchman there, he'd wear shorts and everything; you know how they are with a ship that they were about a 10,000 tonner that used to be old cargo ship and then they made a cargo ship out of it.

Well, I tell you, it was rough. Because, like for in the heads—where you went to the toilet they call a head—just like big eaves trough down there and every so often there was a couple slats across. So, when you go up there—and there was water continually from a hose; they'd pump sea water, I imagine, down there, and that would flush out, see. So, that's okay?

Here we gets in between Hawaii and California, storm comes up, and a good one. And boy, she was, she was, I'd say from what I could see, I'd say waves, thirty, thirty-five feet, which for this tub were pretty; boy, she was—pretty soon they say, everybody stay in their bunks and everything, we're going to have trouble here for a while, it's going to be awful. Their rudder, the motor on their rudder, went to hell. So what they had to do, you can steer the ship from the back, there's a manual steerer; it's always by the fantail, there's a great big wheel back there. The guys couldn't stand that, so they lashed that so she'd just go in a circle. If you can imagine what that was, going in a circle like that. And see, as a rule they'd kind of hit the waves head on, but this way we were just—everybody I believe aboard that ship got seasick except the Dutch crew that was running it. If it wouldn't have been for that, I think she would have sunk. Even the Javanese that were on that thing, well, you can imagine what that was.

The gangways that went up there they always had canvas below those and everything. And when you went to eat up there they'd have a table, stainless steel tables about this big; you never sit down, you just have trays on there and you'd go to eat and they, at that time they give you apples and stuff like that; but you'd have to

go up there to eat it and that. And, at first, when the storm first started, you'd get shit on a shingle—you know, that chipped beef. Well, anyway, everybody starts getting sick. And you can imagine, there would be guys up there and they'd go up to eat something, they maybe didn't eat for a day or two and they'd finally get up there and try to eat and then they'd get sick; they'd leave everything go, vomit all over; all these gangways were awful. And the heads all through there, then a guy would be sitting on the head and then he'd vomit. Why, it was just the rottenest deal that you ever saw!

I got kind of sick, but I went down—I lucked out when I first went in there and I took the lowest bunk that I could. There's two advantages to that. See, you're stacked in there, you've got about that much room. You're stacked in there six high. It's okay on the bottom, way on the bottom, but on the next one, a lot of guys have to step on there to crawl up to the top. And, then, if a guy gets sick you're on the bottom, too. But, at least on the bottom you don't get the rocking like that, you know. It was—

Bruce Tessner: Do you remember how many days it took you to get to Hawaii, do you recall, a week or less?

Bill Lemke: Oh, it was less than a week.

Bruce Tessner: Less than a week.

Bill Lemke: Yeah.

Bruce Tessner: But more probably than—

Bill Lemke: And then one destroyer stayed back with us. Because there was supposed to be Jap submarines in that area. But the thing is, he stayed back with us, and it seemed like the storm started letting up; and then I don't know if they could start steering it manually from the fantail or if they fixed the thing. Anyway, we started going one line there. Because that was the damnedst trip, boy.

Bruce Tessner: But the trip from Hawaii to Iwo Jima was much longer I assume?

Bill Lemke: Oh, yeah.

Bruce Tessner: You didn't make land between Hawaii and Iwo Jima?

Bill Lemke: Oh, yeah.

Bruce Tessner: Oh, you did?

Bill Lemke: We stopped at Saipan.

Bruce Tessner: Oh, you went to Saipan.

Bill Lemke: We never got—I'll tell you about that too. When we got into Hawaii then we went through our training and everything, and then we're going to start going to Iwo Jima; because we were a replacement battalion, you do a lot of work for—you're like a pioneer battalion. The Marines like to do their own work, you know.

So, come to load the ships and they had all gooks that were in Hawaii, most of them are Japanese and that, and they had them doing the lifts and everything like that; and the Marines said we don't want them loading our ships, we'll send our own men to load our ships. Then guys aboard the ships that knew—see, on every ship there's two, three holds, and then they have these little cranes that are off on there, and then they had, our guys would come up there running the forklifts. Everything was in pallets, pallets or big baskets like that. So we start—because to begin with those longshoremen were only going to work eight hours, and they wanted to get loaded and out of there. Well, anyway, we set a record, we had three ships that were being loaded in that area with everything from soup to nuts and they were; we loaded that in thirty-five hours you know. That was a record. You worked right straight through, you catch a nap here and there, and that was it.

My job, with another guy, all we did was hook-up pallets and these baskets, and you take the cables that come down and then one guy on each side and you'd hold them around so they'd hook around on the pallets. Well, one day they were hooking-up, there was one cable was real frayed from being hooked-up all the time, and a guy, I lent him \$10, for collateral he give me a big silver Marine Corps ring—it was silver, it had a big emblem on, the Marine Corps emblem. And, after I lent him that money, I never saw him after that, and I ended up with the ring, see. The ring must have been worth \$20 maybe. So that's okay. This one day working there I goes to hook-up, and kind of cables were kind of twisty and everything, you had to keep them until it caught, you know, and I had my hand over here going. If one of those wires didn't hook around that Marine Corps emblem on there and the guy that's up there, he looks up, when he sees it hooked-up he looks back to the hold where it's going to come up and then he tells them where to put it down, as we had already looked across. Here my arm is

going up—I'm hooked on that lousy ring. Well, I thought I'm going to lose a finger. It did scratch off—at the last minute that was only soldered, that emblem was soldered unto there, it pulled the emblem off and I was taken off my feet. So that's—almost lost a finger there. Right there I took what was left of her and threw her in the drink and never wore a ring since.

Well, we loaded that ship and everything then. And then from there, we're near the harbor and the beach, instead of going back, it was Christmas, coming up to Christmas, see. And, new guys, now, you did such a good job there, you know, I'll go down on the beach, and where the beach was it would like Lakeside Park, only it was all sand, and they had been ten, twelve LST's [Landing Ship, Tank] pulled up there with their things down, and then trucks were coming down, now you start loading them up. There was maybe a company of us, you know.

So the way they'd load those LSD's [Landing Ship, Dock], on the bottom there they'd put all the tents and everything, and then on top of there they'd put two layers of sixteen-foot plank, you know, plank that all. Then they might run in vehicles in there, you know, all that. But everything was, they were loaded right up to the thing. Some were all ammo and everything like that that, too. So, that's the way it went.

Christmas, that time, you're living on the beach, it's raining all the time. You put up your shelter half. You know what a shelter half—each one has a half, and you make a shelter out of that. Jesus Christ, for about ten minutes they keep the rain out, and then, with these tropical rains it's raining all the time. You didn't mind it because you're outside but all our stuff is getting wet. So, that's okay.

We get those loaded up, then there was like two or three left. The guys go, where the hell are we going, you know? You'll ask two or three LSD's you're going to go on those. Well, the LSD that we went on, that was full of AMtracks [land-water tracked military vehicles], that was the tankers or, you know, the guys that run these AMtracks up there, alligators they call them, you know. Well, there's twelve of them on there and then the crews that's with them—I guess there was men, that's twenty-four guys, maybe they had five or six for maintenance. And they'd put about I'd say twenty of us on there. And this LST that I got on had a LCT on top of there. You know what LCT is? Well, that's a landing craft, tank. All it is, like a big barge, you know, and it sets on there on pillars like that are on there and it's all chained down and

everything. Well, that's where we ended up— [small gap in tape] I just want to go back. When we were on the beach I told you it was Christmas, see, and a little after Christmas, that's when we left. But, you know, what we had for Christmas dinner there, what you were eating there, they have a field stove, all that is is a little stove, it's got the gas heater goes in there, you know, one of those torches, garbage can, and then they'd open about two, three cases of gallon stew, dump her in there and then leave that on. Well, Christmas they had that going all day. You had that for breakfast, dinner and supper. For supper that evening there was about that much charcoal burned through in the bottom of that thing. And, if somebody went and was fool enough to dig around in the bottom so all those chunks of black burn was in there and that old burnt stew, that's what we had for Christmas dinner. You know, they treated you right.

So that's okay, we got on the LST's and I told and I told you the one I got on had an LCT on top. We got in that LCT. Because at least it was open and stuff. And we had on our cots and that; we could open up your cot and you could lay in there pretty good. Some guys got underneath.

Bruce Tessner: When you say open, you don't mean open to the elements?

Bill Lemke: Yeah.

Bruce Tessner: Oh, it was.

Bill Lemke: Oh, yeah, just open.

Bruce Tessner: Totally, right?

Bill Lemke: On an LST there isn't much, it's all—

Bruce Tessner: But, I thought the LST still had—

Bill Lemke: No, all they are is like a barge, LST. That's to go in shallower places when they bring in like maybe there could be four, five tanks that they could bring in there, drop her down and run in. So, that's okay.

It goes on that, and just for luck it was calm and everything and it wasn't bad, you know. And when we went from there to Saipan, and off of Saipan in an anchorage there, that's where we had to transfer over to troop ship, you know, because the LST's then they were just going to; like the one I had was the AMtrack crew in

there and LST crew. Well, that was rough eating there, too, because they weren't set up to cook for that many guys. So, most of the time, all I'd do is eat rations. What the hell. You'd get, with your mess gear there all they do is throw canned stuff in there and put it out, and I'd just eat the rations.

So, anyway, we gets off Saipan and set there a day or two. But meanwhile, every time you get near islands, and clouds start forming and the rain comes, you know. Off there, for about a day straight, it just rained like a son of a gun. At least, we were like in an anchorage, you know.

But, got your sea bag and all that stuff and all your blankets and everything like that, everything is all soaked. Well, actually, no; the sea bags we left back on the beach and they were kept in Hawaii then, but everything like in your back, you have a couple of blankets and your poncho and your shelter half and all that stuff and your extra clothes—everything wetter than hell.

Then, they take you over to the ship. Well, that's, one thing there—it was rougher than hell where these bigger ships were sitting because it was stormy and that. So. Gets in there and I'm holding the—had to climb up this time instead of climbing down, and Jesus, eight ten meters, water's coming in there. I got, it was banging up there and one guy there he's kind of clumsy, anyway he gets halfway up and pulling down and he feels it coming up, he just drops back in the boat, he thought it was coming up him. Ship there did crush a couple guys. You'd be in there and it would come up on you like your legs and that it would be crush, you were dead.

So, that's okay. I'm holding the thing. When he come down his rifle kind of hit me here in the hand, you know, kind of; to this day it's kind of goofed up there, you know. I don't know what the hell.

Bruce Tessner: Were you boarding the—

Bill Lemke: We were boarding the transports.

Bruce Tessner: —on the cargo net.

Bill Lemke: On the cargo net. So, that's okay, it swelled up like that and everything.

We gets on there and away we go. They had a doctor on there. He was a doctor like for a battalion. And the guy said you'd better go

over and see him. I went there, you know; they have a little room in there that they have like it's on a ship that it's like a little dispensary and stuff

Jungle Jim was there, and that's a story in itself, that guy. He was an alcoholic; been a China Marine for years and he was a doctor of the battalion. He didn't have, he didn't have mercy for anybody, you know. Went in there, yeah, he said, you got quite a knock there. I can see, but I don't think anything's broken. He said can you go like this. I said, yeah. He said, you're okay.

Bruce Tessner: Pull the trigger.

Bill Lemke: Yeah, he was a character.

One time after that when we got back to me, well, I've got to tell you a thing about him, we were still training like hell to go to Japan there, we were in camp, and I got jock itch, you know what jock itch is. Well, anyway, I went there to see him, you know. So I got there. Do you wear shorts? Yeah. You're dumb, he says, in this climate, he says, you shouldn't—he says he get rid of your shorts and just wear pants, you get more air. he said you're sweating all the time, that's where you've got your jock itch from. I says okay. He tells the corpsman give him Secilic acid, that's what it is, it's white, it's whole—it's in the, I think some of it is the (Inaudible) and everything like that. But, it's for stuff like that, you know.

Well, anyway, he goes and he gets the bottle and puts a glob in there. Oh, Christ, (Inaudible) jump like that. From where this was in the regiment over about to where the thing is I ran all the way back there and went in the shower. I couldn't stand it. So, that's okay. He said come back tomorrow before I left. He was setting there. You talk about these guys making their own alcohol, he sat around with that medical alcohol all the time. So that's okay.

But blisters and everything, the next day I went back. What the hell did you do? I put on there what you told me. He said, you took the bottle with the pure stuff, he said, the other bottle there, that's watered down fifty percent, you pretty near burned his leg off. So, you know, that was the end of that. And, after that, I didn't wear those long shorts anymore; I never was bothered with that. He knew his business there.

Then, after that we were playing—we had to play ball and that; we only had three days in camp and then they'd want you; they didn't

like you to sit around, you know, so we were playing ball. The darn field was all crushed lava and everything like that. You know, it wasn't a smooth baseball field. I'm running around there and I twisted my ankle.

Bruce Tessner: Is this back in Hawaii?

Bill Lemke: Back in Hawaii. This is after. I'm just going to tell you about the doctor. So that's okay.

I couldn't walk in the afternoon, 4:30 going to go—you've got to make a formation to go to mess hall, if you don't make the formation, you just can't go. But I used to keep sardines and cans with the fruit that you buy from the PX, like sardines were a nickel a can and I'd always buy some and put them in my sea bag and some crackers that you didn't have to go to the mess hall. So that's okay. One guy said, I'll help you over there. I said, I'll never be—you had to walk about a block, block and a half over to the mess hall. I said, I'll just stay back here.

So, next morning they said they're going to go out in the field, you know. And I said, I can't go, Christ, I'm—he said well, go over there and go to the doctor. So I hobbled over there. Now, what happened to you? I sprained my ankle. He says, what the hell's wrong with you. He said you sit on your ass for a few days here and it will take you a week to cure that. He says, I'll give you light duty here, just light duty. That means that I'd go hobbling around one foot there and clean up the cigarette butts and all that crap, you know. But, you know, in a couple of days—oh, he said, he said, he put ice blocks on there and by the first hour (Inaudible) —he said, put ice on, we don't want this guy laid up for two weeks.

So anyway, in a couple days they shipped me back; I was okay. It hurt a little bit, but, boy, he cured it in a hurry. He really knew plenty when it come to most stuff.

Then, he'd give you, he put up that picture, they weren't actual pictures, they were painted, it would show people in shock and stuff like that and what you could do to help your buddies when they get that way and everything, and then he'd give you a little (Inaudible) I remember one outfit I was with, he said, one guy, he was the best guy and he was so religious and he was such a good guy, everybody liked him, he was (Inaudible) he said he gets out there and what do you know, he gets part of his leg shot off. And he said, what did he do, he says, he knew enough to put a tourniquet on there, but he said he laid there come and get me,

come and get me. We sent a couple guys out there and they start getting fire, we don't want to lose any more men on him. He laid out there, he says, pretty soon he started calling for his mother, and then he wanted Jesus to help him. He said he ended up croaking right there. And, he said, the only thing was he didn't have enough goddamn guts to crawl in where he was okay, he says, he still had one good leg and two arms. That's the way it was.

Bruce Tessner: This guy's a real character.

Bill Lemke: That's right. Well, anyway, we're at Saipan.

Bruce Tessner: Yeah, I was going to say, one question I had, do you recall how long it took you to, in the LST, from Hawaii to Saipan? Was it a week or more?

Bill Lemke: Well, we left around the first, I'd say around the first of January, and it took longer than that because—

Bruce Tessner: That's a long trip from Hawaii to Japan.

Bill Lemke: Yeah, and these LST's only do about 10 knots, so. I would have to kind of look the way the land—

Bruce Tessner: It took you probably more than two weeks.

Bill Lemke: Yeah.

Bruce Tessner: You were at sea a long time.

Bill Lemke: Yeah.

[End of tape 1, side B]

Bruce Tessner: But, basically, the weather was decent most of the way?

Bill Lemke: Yeah, until we got to Saipan. So that was okay. Then we're aboard the ship. Well, what do you do (Inaudible)

Bruce Tessner: Did you spend time on land in Saipan?

Bill Lemke: No, just in the (Inaudible).

Bruce Tessner: Never got off the boat.

Bill Lemke: We were in the harbor there. But as we were there—we were there for three days, you can see all these B-29's taking off going on bombing runs. And, I remember one (inaudible) going, one after the other. One goes like that, because we were just off shore, gets about, oh, I'd say 5, 600 feet off the end, boom, she just blew up. Don't know what happened.

Bruce Tessner: You saw a B-29 blow up.

Bill Lemke: Yeah. It must have had something that went in there. I don't know what it was carrying. It was a big puff of fire, and she went down in the ocean.

Bruce Tessner: The bomb load, one of the bomb loads exploded.

Bill Lemke: It could have been. But anyway, that's one we saw.

So, and we got in on this transport and everybody, everything wet. So what do you try to do? You try to dry your blankets out, anyway. The other stuff will dry better, but the blankets that they had were heavy wool, and you know how slow wool dries. Well, to begin with, in all these areas they have where the troops are, they have oscillating fans. They weren't the best fans, but they worked. An officer came down there in our area, and there's holes in there where the fan was and a plug there, the fans aren't there, you know, the area like that where there's maybe three, four, 500 guys in that area and there should have been a half-dozen fans and there maybe was one. Boy, he goes up in the area where the officer could go up there but none of us could, up where there's sailors in there; every goddamn sailor has a fan on their bunk, you know, they're getting the fans. He went to the captain, he says, I'll give them a half-hour to get these goddamn fans down that compartment, he says, otherwise we're coming up and getting them; and he says, anybody that's going to get in their way is going to get the shit knocked out of them. It wasn't half-hour they were down there screwing them back in. You know, that's the (Inaudible).

Then, we're on the ship and we gets off at Iwo Jima. Well, some of the troops that were on there—there's 3500 guys on there—some of those guys were going in for, on the later landings, you know, they were like on the beach corps and everything and that. Well, we're right off Iwo Jima, I'd say we're maybe a mile and a half, mile offshore, because, in between, these battlewagons were coming right up there just offshore and they're just black. To begin with, we were out further then the first landed, and they had

the hill and barrage, and that, you maybe saw that on television. We were just maybe out two, three miles there. Then we pulled in closer because we had guys that were landed off of there. And it was just amazing (Inaudible) but they were in there. See, these battlewagons could take a hit from like a five-inch shell and that that didn't mean anything.

They had most of their troops they had neutralized by then. They would start opening up; they don't do it in one round—it took two, three rounds. By the time they had tried to get the third one off, they had it knocked out. And, it was really something to see.

It was such a nice morning. It wasn't much rough, and it was blue sky, and they went in there. But it wasn't long even on our ship they started bringing guys out. I guess the first day they had three, 4,000 casualties.

Bruce Tessner: Sure. There were fighter planes too, I understand.

Bill Lemke: Oh, yeah, fighter planes and they were going there and that. I got to tell you there, after we were on the beach there, one day here washed up a body of a fighter pilot. He had the leather jacket. That was a Navy pilot. He got hit out there or something, and he maybe ejected the plane; but then he drowned. We were working along the beach.

So then we stayed there. And like I say, some of the guys in our outfit there were supposed to go in the thirteenth wave; that would have been Higgins; and so conglomerated and they ran into more trouble than they ever thought they were going to have, so they canceled all that.

But, in between, they had some guys that weren't supposed to be in there and they got in there, there they are. And see, the general there, he was an artillery expert, and he had everything zeroed in. They didn't have—and there were so many people there no matter where they dropped them in, somebody was going to get it.

You know, they just—a lot of these Higgins boats got hit and they were broached; and even some LST's; they tried to run them in right away and then they'd get hit and then they'd get side, they call it broaching; they'd try to head in and hold up, but they'd get sideways and then they'd be in.

Tried to run Jeeps and trucks off there, never thought, that sand that was there was like coffee grounds and if you'd step in it, you'd

go in like that, real loose sand, real course. They'd try to run a vehicle off there. Unless they put something down like these metal outfits that they make airfields out of and stuff like that, they'd just bog right down. They'd be bogged down and the next ship that comes in go right on top of them, push them in. And they couldn't---even some of the tanks---see on the island there was like three steps. They had a storm there some years before and it made---the waves came in there so fat and steps came up fifteen feet, and there were three of them that went up fifty feet; but one time they had waves in there fifty feet high going in on that island. And that made it a lot harder for the landing because these tanks would try to get up there and they'd just spin, you know, no traction.

Bruce Tessner: So, what else?

Bill Lemke: And (inaudible) two in the morning, then we landed on there. We landed on the green beach right below. And we got still some fire off there. Because Suribachi wasn't here until the third wave. We were right—I'd say we were about 4 or 500 yards right below there where we holed up. And then we made a secure area, like there would be a breakthrough or anything, you put your rounds so you could stop that.

But, meanwhile, nights and sometimes during the day, the first day or two not because they'd be dropping shells in there; but nights, then, they'd run an LST in there—then they'd go down there and you unload it. It would have like these weasels and stuff like that and AMtracks that still had, weren't hit, load ammunition on and stuff like that and unload them, then they'd get in the secure area. I've got to tell you, the first day we were there, that night, you're in a hole with a buddy—and such a darn thing making a decent hole because it would keep coming in, coming in and make your hole shallow; so I found out the best way instead of with just the shovel, I had to shovel, he had a pick; a pick didn't do you any good there, so take your steel helmet off and scoop the sand out with that. And that was still a job if you wanted to get down there good, you know.

The only thing with that sand, especially small mortars that would come in, they'd go in and they'd go in maybe two feet or so and that sand would muffle them. One could drop, like a mortar, it could drop pretty close but you'd never get any shrapnel. It was muffled, which was good, see.

Well, anyway, this is in the afternoon about, oh, I'd say about just before dark, you know, and a buddy of mine he was going the other way; a couple more scoops I'll take out. At night, then, they'd stop dropping stuff in there. They knew you were unloading, then they'd drop—you didn't know where it was going to hit or what—boom, one would go off, you know. So, I got one more scoop, so I'll take it. I threw one out, the last one, and then I just sat down—pow, one come in. One must have been watching me and he'd seen my head come up, my head come up, he must have waited. If I'd went up one more time, I'd a got her right in the head.

Bruce Tessner: From a mortar?

Bill Lemke: No, a regular sniper, yeah. Hit the other side of the—I quit putting my head up there, I'll tell you.

Bruce Tessner: Decided to dig the hole a little bit deeper, huh?

Bill Lemke: Right.

Bruce Tessner: So you were with the 27th. I know the 28th was the one that surrounded Suribachi.

Bill Lemke: Yeah, see, the 27th cut across the island at the narrowest point. And then the 28th job was to turn to the left and take Suribachi and the 26th was supposed to be in reserve to help them both out.

But, yeah when that flag went up and everything, it's right there in front of us. We're right at the base.

Bruce Tessner: I was going to see, you could see it.

Bill Lemke: Yeah.

Bruce Tessner: There were two flags then.

Bill Lemke: Yeah. Well, I tell you. I didn't see the first one go up, but the second one I did. The first one was kind of—we weren't watching all the time, we were working around the beach there cleaning up and that. But everybody started hollering and then you look, there you are.

Bruce Tessner: So this is day two, day three then.

Bill Lemke: That would have been day three, see.

So then we stayed back in the back of the front line and then they start getting guys shot, they'd get them as replacements. Well, in the squad I was with, there was two brothers, Litsow brothers, from Pennsylvania. They were trained as tank drivers. So, as soon as they start knocking out some of these tanks, these Litsows left us. Then there was another kid, he was in grave registration. He had been trained for that. And then he left us. And then they start losing guys after maybe a week or so they start losing so many, and the Navy quit, losing their stretcher bearers, they were losing too many men, so they start taking Marines. That's where I was good. I was small and they'd take the bigger guys. That was a tough job too. You go out there to pick guys up, four guys to a stretcher, and no weapons. They would go and get them out. A lot of times they'd be back where it wasn't much going on, they'd be—they bypassed so many guys because everything was holed up in holes in the ground all over and they were crawling all over. And then these four guys would come trotting, they were back of the front line, they'd open fire. There would be a guy with a machine gun or something and he'd maybe get two of them or three of them and a guy that was—and before somebody else went over there and they'd find where you are.

I tell you, there was places there like—see, I wasn't in the first couple of waves there, but guys I was with later, when they first went there, they'd go by, buried in the sand places and that they had these concrete bunkers, you know, and they'd have, most of those they shot they had machine guns on them. They'd have a loader and 40 rounds in there and it was rapid fire. She shot faster than our Browning automatic rifle. And it had on higher pop. You could tell right away when they were shooting at you.

Well, anyway, they'd be up in there and, sure, they'd see the fire—actually, the way the Marine Corps, the way you're trained, you go, and if you receive any fire, you throw so much on, fire at them, they've got to hole up, they can't fire, you know what I mean, you're throwing so much at them. Then you go up there and neutralize that place. You keep firing so you got to stay back and you either flame thrower go up there and shoot or you throw a satchel charge in there, blow her up, and that's it and you keep going like that. And you're trained like that that you think you could take any object. See, that's the way the German Army worked too. You were assault troops, that's what they were mainly. See, that's where Howling Mad Smith, our general, where he got in trouble on Saipan where this one Army outfit, they'd stay back, stay back, and the Marines were—and here you go, you're

getting oblique fire on a lot of these places, the Japs. There might be a place here, there's a place here, he's covering this place, there's a place here, they never fire when you're right in front of them, you're always getting it from this way. This guy covers that guy, this guy covers that guy. That's the way they do. Now, you're throwing, you're coming here, all our fire is going straight in there, like artillery and everything. You have these places, they could be back there. you could shoot all day on the front of that cliff and they'd be shooting out the sides, they wouldn't bother them there. When you come there, they're firing on the side.

But here's another thing, here are these two regiments or companies are moving up here; this one company, pretty soon it dawns on you, they're getting all fire. You can shoot all day straight ahead and you'd never see anything—very seldom if you saw one come off. You'd have to shoot at the holes you shoot this way. If you see a hole this way, you shoot this way where the fire's coming at you. But, if this company here moves up a little, they might quit firing. Here this company moves up there, pretty soon you're firing. If an outfit stays back, you're getting fire from this. Do you mean [know?] what I mean? On your flank you're getting the fire from your own troops. See, that's the way they had.

Well, on Saipan, this, these Army outfits set back and they keep firing and half the time they're shooting into the Marine Corps flanks. That's where, on Saipan, Howling Mad Smith, he told this one general, he was from New York and it was all National Guard; National Guard outfits were worth a shit in my opinion, if you read any of these biographies, they weren't worth anything. Didn't have enough—all they were were beer (Inaudible), beer party once a month. And then they all went to Fort Lewis; they were supposed to go to Korea, wasn't it, I think so, that was before, it was before Vietnam. They were supposed to go to Korea, company and they went to Fort Lewis, they were classed as unable to be—

Bruce Tessner: Yeah, a lot of guys from Fond Du Lac went.

Bill Lemke: Yeah, they weren't able to go—

Bruce Tessner: That was, that was during the Berlin Crisis, with, you know, with Russia, and these guys were called up. That's when Kennedy was president then.

Bill Lemke: But I think they even were called up once for Korea.

Bruce Tessner: Oh, yeah, they thought maybe they would come across the line again in Korea, another Korean War.

Bill Lemke: All the six and five, all of them, there were six and five striped sergeants and that; Red Shepprel, he was like fifty years old. What the hell. All the guys that had all the stripes were all old guys or were unable, they were unfit for combat.

Bruce Tessner: I remember those guys.

Bill Lemke: Christ, all they were doing was going there for a drunk every week. And then that outfit, they were smart, they didn't take them, they would have been all shot to hell.

Bruce Tessner: But Howling Mad Smith, from what I read, he got in big trouble because he cashiered a couple of those generals.

Bill Lemke: He did, he got rid of two Army generals, and, you know, he was, for all the deals he had across the Pacific, went across there, he got so much, Nimitz got so much grief from the big shots in New York and that, he wasn't allowed to go in on the signing of the thing on the *Missouri*. He's the only general that they; that's the way they got back at him.

Nimitz had orders that guy is not going to come there. Because this one general there, I guess he got to be a big politician in New York then, see. Most of these generals that were National Guard, it was all politics about like the Civil War; see, that was all—didn't know anything. Yeah, the Army was great, but their idea would be set back and pound them for a week or two weeks and that and then they'd go and they'd maybe still suffer a lot of casualties, but the Marine Corps, they'd just go; they maybe had a lot of casualties, but they got it over, you know.

Bruce Tessner: And he was criticized too, I guess he was madder than hell as from what I read that he wanted ten days of bombardment on Iwo Jima—

Bill Lemke: Exactly.

Bruce Tessner: —and the Navy said well, we'll give you three and that was about it.

Bill Lemke: See, they were sending Liberator bombers over there for a month ahead. But, like I say, they had all this stuff buried under it and then that sand muffled it, that was just like rain on the roof.

What I was going to tell you, these guys were telling me how when they first went there they neutralized a pillbox. You know, most of these pillboxes were just like light machine guns then. So, that's okay. And, go beyond there and maybe start working on another one. Meanwhile, the way this was later on we found, all concrete with a slit in there, no opening in the back or anything, just the front where the gun stuck out. In there they had like a ship's—like in a submarine, one of those hatches. Below there they maybe had thirty or forty guys in a room with more guns and stuff like that. These two guys that were up there they'd get knocked out, burned up and stuff like that. Our guys would go by, they'd open the hatch; two more would go up there, fresh gun, everything. Here the next guys come, they saw they neutralized that, they were just not being very careful; they open up on them again. So then these guys start firing at that pillbox, the other guys in front there start hollering, you're firing at us. You know what I mean? That's what the confusion was.

What they had to do then, if they'd hit a place like that, right way they'd have to hit like 500 pounds of C-2 or something like that, explosive, put it there and really blow it so if they had a hatch or anything in there it would spring it; they couldn't come out. You know. But, meanwhile, they could crawl over some other place—you know, it was all connected with tunnels and stuff like that.

Bruce Tessner: I understand there were miles and miles and miles of—

Bill Lemke: That's right.

Bruce Tessner: Most of it they said was hand-dug. They said these Korean laborers, you know, did it by hand a lot because the volcanic rock wasn't so hard to do.

Bill Lemke: You'd see, in some of these places you'd see the pick-marks where they'd go and then they'd just pick out—it was pretty near like, it would be like, chalk on that so they could dig like crazy in there.

Bruce Tessner: Yeah, one quote, I always got a kick out of reading about it, is they said the Marines fought the battle on top of the island and the Japs fought the battle under the island.

Bill Lemke: That's right. You never—I had one night out there—I wasn't in the line yet—on the second airfield for the 27th; they killed a lot of them. This guy it was against his orders, he didn't want them to do that. He wanted them just to hang back. I guess they killed five, 600 that one night. They come down the airfield. Most of the time they'd be sacking-out and they're going to die for the emperor there so they're going to heaven. I mean, that was it.

Bruce Tessner: So, then you, when did you go into the regiment's line then?

Bill Lemke: That would have been after we got to the third airfield, beyond there, then we were called-up. See, that's just a little bit of some of the territory there. It was just—just a little bit of some of the territory there. It was just—

Bruce Tessner: So we're talking like D plus five or D plus six.

Bill Lemke: Oh, no, it was—

Bruce Tessner: Later than that?

Bill Lemke: —later than that. This was hill—combat team; the 28th took that. That was all pounding down from artillery. You know what I mean—there was a big thing there.

That's one night they had sent an air raid over there. Big guy from Mississippi beside us, he shit his pants that night. He said I was just ready to go, but I couldn't hold it.

Bruce Tessner: So, you went in about the—

Bill Lemke: I really don't know what the days were, because at that time the days were—

Bruce Tessner: Let's see, we're talking February 19th was when the invasion started.

Bill Lemke: It would have been around right this area. It would have been D plus 12, in there, in that area, yeah,

Bruce Tessner: That was one of the worst spots, I guess.

Bill Lemke: Hey, from here on, like we, in this area, they were making another airfield down there and they had it bulldozed down pretty good. Down here it starts getting pretty rocky. Up in here this was all sand, and that was, it was bad enough, but down in here it was all

rocky, you know. And, that's the area where when we first went up there and you dig a hole, you'd get about that far and it's pretty hard to get a deep one, so they've got rocks and that you put around.

The ground was so goddamn hot that you'd have to take your poncho off and everything and put it down there because you couldn't sit there, it was hot. And the thing is, in the morning if you had like C-rations, poke some holes in the can and bury it a little deeper in the hole; you leave it there about 15, 20 minutes and it would be bubbling.

Bruce Tessner: Because of the volcanic action.

Billo Lemke: Volcanic, it was hot in there. And then, at night where the shells that hit in there and were, that bulldozer went through there and everything, steam would keep coming up there. And, boy, that's a son-of-a-gun because it looks like there's shadows and everything out there. You weren't supposed to really shoot unless you saw somebody, you know. As a rule, like in that area that we (Inaudible), but when they got in the rock where it's really rocky like a jungle, all you do there is throw grenades at night. Because you didn't have anything—one time, I and the guy I was with, we'd have Browning automatic rifle, which is a lot of firepower, and maybe from here to that bush out there, that lilac, that was our field of fire. What are you going to do there?

So, usually it would start, you'd hear somebody out there, and during the night your mortar crew behind there; one in a while they're sending up flares, punk it will go, and then, here you can really see. Then, offshore every once in a while, they've got communication, they'll call up, there will be destroyers out there—it will shoot a magnesium flare. That baby goes up maybe, oh, maybe five, 6,000 feet. That will burn, oh, five minutes. And, boy, that lights up the whole—you'd want to do that when you think they were going to pull something, you know. But that's all night long. Punk, one would go up and light up there and all across there all outfits were the same. But that was that way.

And then, from the sand, the s and would do it too, but then when you got in there your hands would be, it was like you had yellow jaundice, because it would be from so much sulfur in there. Actually, "Iwo" means "sulfur island." That's what it means.

Bruce Tessner: So you were up on the line then. Then what?

Bill Lemke: Well, you'd be up on the line for three days, and then you'd just go back of the line and you'd be in the rest area., but there's snipers and that around there all the time.

That's another reason it was lucky I was small. Say, the three of us would be around the hole in the middle of the day and that and you're poking around and just cleaning things up, all of a sudden maybe he's the biggest one, bang, some sniper would nail him. And then they'd get a squad out there, and usually they'd find out where it come from, they'd find some hole over there where he's crawled in and they'd burn him out. But, because he was tall, bigger, they'd figure officer. Same way, you never went around and went like this. A lot of these officers, that's where they got it right away. They'd pick them off right away.

See, I wasn't with them then, but the 27th they lost, they had that John Basslone, he was a, he was in the machine gun squad; he was like a five or six-stripe sergeant and there was four or five sergeants, and they were in a big shell hole from a 16-inch shell. Now, a 16-inch shell makes a pretty big hole, maybe twenty foot open on top, maybe ten, twelve feet deep even in that sand. Because you're figuring a ton of explosive. Well, that's where they had their CP like in there. And they were in there discussing, they dropped one of these three-inch mortars right in there, killed the whole works. And that was maybe the second—the third or fourth day that took all their sergeants out right there.

[End of tape 2, side A]

Before that was over, you know, they were sending by plane first, second lieutenants right out from both camps. Well, the one they had at Honaquay I guess where they taught a lot of second lieutenants, they were sending them out there. Here these guys come out there, don't know anything, and even landed some on the airfield there when we secured the airfield and go up and you go up in the front, didn't last long.

Bruce Tessner: You were lucky in a way because they said the guys who were young, hadn't been in action before and then were put in to the line as a reserve—it was really lucky, I guess.

Bill Lemke: That's right. Usually we had—that replacement draft had higher casualties than the regular, because you went up there, you know, you'd have to take the orders and they didn't last.

Bruce Tessner: Now, from looking at the maps that I've seen, that's where Jerry Vashey, the general, did the whole—

Bill Lemke: That's right, that's where he went—

Bruce Tessner: That was in that corner up there and other was his last.

Bill Lemke: That was "bloody gorge" they called it. Like I say, that was 300 yards wide and about 700 yards long. It was caves all the way around the thing. No matter how you got—if you got in there before we got tanks up there you were done.

The reason why there was such a delay—these tanks were trying to make a road to get up into this gully and it was all—it just looked like the lava went over there and it was all ridges where it kind of went down into the sea and then that hole there. Well, they had to push boulders and that that were big as a garage and that out of the way to get a tank through. Like I say, the holes were five yards apart and you couldn't see either way and it's all stones and rocks. Bad news.

And then we kept pushing. They'd go—well, in a day you'd go from—this here is a hundred yards, the front is 300 feet. You'd go a hundred yards. By the time you got a hundred yards you'd lose so many men either killed or wounded that you had to go back in the same hole you were that night. It had to be three, four days in a row.

Then they'd take us out of the line, put another outfit in there, they'd get the same thing. Until they got the tanks. What they should have done is just set there; but no, keep pounding, keep pounding.

Because they said that wasn't that much resistance then. My foot there wasn't! Like I say, after they said the island was secured, a thousand more casualties. And, like here, there was 55,000 some dead—actually, there were 6800 that were killed there, but— **[gap in tape]**

Bill Lemke: Anyway, it's getting to be a bitch. Every day you'd go out and you'd lose a few, you know. And what can you do, never be able to have the satisfaction of seeing them come at you and shoot them or anything like that. You always had to shoot blind. When we first started out there you could shoot at night a little bit because you had a little field of fire, but then we started getting in the rough places and they had what they called sugar loaves there, that's

what they called them, they'd be little ridges going up. Usually they had a lot of fortifications on the back side, but they had a lot of holes and that on the front side. So you'd shoot the front up and you'd think you had them, you'd get up to the top and you started going back down there and they were on the reverse ridge, you know. On the reverse ridge was a lot of times where they had their mortar and that anyway, the mortar pits, because the artillery, the only way they could hit them was with mortar fire, you know. And that's where they shot the hell out of it. There was one outfit aside of us there had a whole platoon on this ridge, and it must have been a major ammunition store. When all these guys were on there they blew it up. And I'm telling you, that ridge ran, oh, from here over to the road and like that, the whole works, they were either buried or killed right there, the whole works. Blew her up.

And, then, that's the way it was, just a matter of attrition all the way through.

And the one day we were going up a place, we moved over and took somebody's territory, like the 26th moved over, they were getting shot, moved over there. There was one Marine, he was sitting by a rock like this and his rifle down like that and he'd just been hit like that morning. A mortar shell must have hit on that rock and hit in the the back of the neck like that. It's just like somebody took an axe and sliced in his neck. He was dead, see. Goddamn it. They were dropping mortars all the time. Got so I always put—if we were under fire, I'd go to sleep, I'd put my arm in between my helmet and neck there, you'd think that would help you. It wouldn't have but that's the way. And, do you know, for six months after that I'd go to sleep at night, I'd wake up in the morning and my arm would be up. My arm would go to sleep or something. It just got to be a habit that you'd think you were protecting your neck.

So went on and finally got down to where—you go so far and pretty soon you think it's not real, it's a dream. That's what you just start thinking. And, I'd be in the hole there sometime, you're undernourished and everything, twenty-some days, no shower or no nothing like that. My leg would be black and blue because I'd keep pinching myself, wake-up, you know. Not that you weren't sharp. You could be going and running through a place that we were getting fire at, there would be all these little places that when you're moving up that they fire down that way, and you were so sharp that the minute one bullet—you could tell when they whack over your head, like somebody snaps a whip beside you; that's the way the bullet, it don't whine or any, like cracking a whip beside

you, you know they're close then. And you'd just go down, just flop like that and crawl out of there or something.

One day I ran across one place like that. The only thing that saved me, I ran like a son-of-a-bitch, and my shovel went, in back it kind of went around on my, and the goddamn handle went came through, and I was running like hell, and down I went. And, just at that time, a bunch of machine gun fire went through there. I must have just dropped before the guy fired. And they thought I was hit, see. So, I finally crawled out of there and the next guy that came through, he got nailed, see. That's the way it was going.

And about this dream part. I think—I'll just tell you right now—I got it marked in the book there—there's five or six guys that got Medal of Honor in there, seventeen, eighteen years old. There wasn't much bond there. You know, I can see when you go in combat and all of you are together and it's like in the German Army, you fight for each other, you're not fighting for the country, you know. And you read that: seventeen, eighteen; cause of death, fell on a grenade, five of them. Hey, none of them are veterans. Veterans don't do that. You know what I mean, they'll fight like hell, but you don't see any sergeants or anything like that falling on grenades. Kids all, couple times a grenade come in, I fell on it.

Bruce Tessner: You would have fallen on it, had you.

Bill Lemke: To wake up.

Bruce Tessner: To wake up. The veterans probably just pick up the grenade and throw it back, right, or something like that instead of jumping on it, yeah.

Bill Lemke: Because you think you're (Inaudible).

Bruce Tessner: So then you were until the end, right?

Bill Lemke: Near the end.

Bruce Tessner: And they pulled you back eventually.

Bill Lemke: Well, last day, I was on the line—

Bruce Tessner: We can stop for a bit, if you want.

Bill Lemke: I was in a hole there with an Indian, his name was Eagle; come from Minnesota. I was in a hole with him three days and that son-

of-a-bitch never even said two words to me; he was just there. Once he got shot looking like this over, bullet come grazed right down to the bone. Well, they put a Band-Aid on it for him. A couple days later small mortar dropped behind him and a piece of shrapnel hit him in the ass. Didn't go in very far because it was a part of the fuse like, it was aluminum, it didn't go in very far. So, I got holed up with him. Later on—see, I didn't know him before that, but later on here they called him “The Bird.”

In the Marine Corps, every time you were in camp, 240 men in camp; we had always where you made up the camp, put a barbed wire around; you'd keep a guard on there too. Stacked up as high as this house with beer, cases of beer. Every time you were in camp they allowed—they were allowed to sell 200 cases of beer per company. In other words, every guy could get a case of beer. ten cents a can they'd charge you. And they were only supposed to sell you two cans at a time, but the guy would put the case up there like that. You'd be surprised. There's quite a few guys that didn't drink, but the majority of the old guys and a lot of the young guys—the majority of the old guys were actually alcoholics; the old Marines, they were all alcoholics. And, I always had like a case of beer under my thing. I liked Iron City the best. That was from Pittsburgh. Because they were bottles and they come in a case like that and it was all packed full of bottles and sawdust, you know. And it kept it a little cooler. But we always had—but you were there for three days, you know; what the hell, a case of beer lasted me longer than that. Most of the time the guys would come in and borrow beer from me a lot of times. But a lot of times it didn't pay to go on liberty because you'd go down to Hilo [Hawaii] and there they'd charge the hell out of you, and if you were a whiskey drinker or something, you never saw such goddamn labels, it was all like moonshine. They had the goofiest labels you ever heard in your life for whiskey and that there, and then they'd charge big money for that.

When we went on liberty around there we'd go to a place called Camultlow [Kamuela, Hawaii?], it was a little village near there. And see, where we were on that Camp Tarawa, that was the Parker Ranch, that was one of the biggest ranches in the world.

Bruce Tessner: I've heard of that.

Bill Lemke: Yeah. Like when we were on there the only thing, there were times they leased it to the government for like a dollar a year; but the only thing that you had to do every time you dug a hole, you had to cover it up when you left. Of course, with where the

shooting range was, that was in a big bowl that they call the dust bowl, that was all like, oh, there you could shoot all you want—a lot of lav[a?] They didn't have any cattle around there. But, otherwise they had cattle up the ass there. So we could go this Camp Tarawa, and you'd get a great big steak and raw vegetables and French fries; a lot of times they'd French-fry sweet potatoes—that's the first time I ever ate them—they were very good; and you'd have banana pie that they make. And then when we left there, for a quarter you could get like a peck bag of good bananas. And then three or four of us would do it. Instead of going to Hilo, we'd just go over to this place. We'd bum a ride from somebody and go over. And it was just like a ma and pa operation and they like to see you come, that was extra money for them. That's what we would do. That's the way that went.

But getting back to Iwo then. That last few days there, one day that one guy I was in the hole with before that Eagle, he got hit that day. I don't know. I don't know whatever happened to him. They took him out of there. And then I got in with another guy, a guy that I used to know, he was in the 27th with me, we holed up. His name was Leitner from Oklahoma. He's the kind of guy it is, folks had died and then he went to live with his uncle and old man, the uncle in Oklahoma grew cotton and he'd have to pick cotton like a nigger, and then he had scars all over his back where his uncle used to flash him with a mule harness. And, he said I don't know what you did today, but he said a good thrashing a day never hurt anybody. So he went in the Marine Corps when he was young too.

Bruce Tessner: Kind of takes the incentive out of being good.

Bill Lemke: I guess so.

So, anyway, Leitner, he was a big friend with a guy by the name of Martinez; he came from New Jersey, and Martinez, everybody liked him, he was the kind of guy you couldn't help but liking the guy. He wasn't a guy that swore or anything like that and he always had a smile on his face and perfect teeth. He had teeth like Liberace. He had big eyes, he was only about my size, sandy hair, big dark eyes. And you'd go out and water was short and that, he'd brush his teeth every time after he'd eat, even after a ration he was brushing his teeth. We always said, Martinez, you're going to end up in Hollywood. And when we were in camp when he'd go on liberty, I never got to go, but they'd always say the goddamn women, there would be three, four after him all the time. He was just that kind of guy. When he'd laugh he looked like Liberace—he'd squint his eyes and it was perfect, well that's okay.

Leitner was in the hole with me. And finally somebody told him, Leitner was friend with Martinez, but somebody told us, he said, Martinez got it today, you know. He got nailed out there. That's when we were going a hundred yards and a hundred yards back, a hundred yards, a hundred yards back, we weren't getting anyplace, just shooting us up.

So that's okay, we're in there and Jesus Christ, they opened up with us, they were getting near the end, they didn't have nothing but mortars and that left down in this gorge, and our artillery could hardly shoot down in there because it's the end of the island. A couple times they let a couple rounds come over. That one night, gees, we could tell when a 105 was coming in there, you could hear. My partner said we're going to get this one. We had one of those big rocks aside us, we figured—you could tell it was coming to the end, you know. It hit that rock, but it hit at such an angle that ricocheted off of there, do you get what I mean? It didn't hit so that it exploded. And it ricocheted off there and then went out in front there. And when there would just be single rounds like that, boom, and then it would go ooohh, like, that, that would be all the shrapnel going through. It isn't like you see in the movies and that. It's a sound all—especially when there's just single rounds come in like that. They had that goddamn shrapnel sings off like that. So, boy, we were lucky. If that would have exploded on that rock it would have took out about two holes and we would have been one of them. So that's okay, Leitner's in the hole there with me. He says, somebody said, yeah, Marty got it. Yeah, damn it, he and Marty were pretty close.

So that's okay. Next morning we're getting ready to move out. When you get ready to move out they come up there with these trucks that have all these rockets on; they had about sixteen of them, there's been three, four trucks up in there, they do it kind of sneaky because if they—of course they didn't have much for observation at that time. But anytime these trucks come they'd drop mortars and that in there. So, about 7:30, 8 o'clock in the morning you're getting ready, all your ammo ready, you're going to move, last minute they bring these trucks up there. And, meanwhile, you're waiting for that. Wind's from the south, back there the Air Force outfits back in there; already they were handing on the airfield there, 29th and that, and also they had Mustangs fighting—once in a while a Mustang would come over and he'd strafe down in that gorge, but it didn't make any difference because they're all in the hole, see. And you'd hear record players all the time in the morning, they'd play down in the valley, all

these good songs. Here you're getting your ass shot, and you'd hear 387 Sea Base, you got your cinnamon buns coming up. They're eating cinnamon buns back there. You hear that all the time.

Then this one morning comes up there all this shit's going on making you feel shitty anyway, come with these rocket trucks, opened up on, about three truck loads. You see them coming, they're like a flight of arrows. Like when you see they shoot arrows and there would be a whole flock of arrows coming like that, here they come. Lucky they weren't—they were to the side of us a little bit that one truckload. Then another friend of mine, he was over that way, Jesus Christ, two of them hit together like that and one started wobbling down, here it's going to come right on down our line. It did too. Went down there, killed a couple guys. And this one friend of mine from Tennessee—buried him and another guy in the hole. You know, they were buried. He got out of there that way, but he had his eardrums burst and everything. So, that's okay, that's a couple guys short already.

Then we went out. And Eagle was with me. Oh, meanwhile, just before this happened when the barrage went, everything was flying around there because there were a lot of close rounds in there and then the Japs were trying to find where those trucks were and they were shooting a lot of mortars off. Jesus Christ, stuff started flying around and they couldn't dig too deep those rocks all around, you know. you'd dig so far it's all rock you got to pick up rocks and try to, blisters all over your pants leg, all holes, Jesus Christ. So; that's okay.

We were in there when the barrage went on and flip-flop something come, went right between us there. Teeth, Marty's teeth. Shell must have hit in there and blew his head to pieces, his teeth come out. Flew in our hole.

Bruce Tessner: That must have been really, really tough.

Bill Lemke: Leitner picked them up. He says, "Oh, Marty." Put them in his pocket. He knew they were Marty.

Bruce Tessner: This is Martinez.

Bill Lemke: Yeah, that Martinez, yeah. He knew it was his teeth. Perfect, you know. Just clean as a whistle.

So we moved out that day. That day Leitner got it, give a shit.

Bruce Tessner: So he was shot then?

Bill Lemke: Yeah, he got killed. Didn't care.

Bruce Tessner: Did you see him get killed, or was he with you?

Bill Lemke: No, he was a little ways. When you get in where the rocks were, it was a son of a bitch. Didn't have to get very far away.

Bruce Tessner: You guys went for individual cover and stuff like that?

Bill Lemke: Oh, yeah, you couldn't stick together.

And the next day then I got put in with that Eagle, you know. They used to say about him, he was a drunk, and he'd come down by the mess hall and instead of his mess gear he'd just bring his steel helmet. Go through the lunch there with the steel helmet. When you were in camp like that you'd get a little better food once in a while, you get chicken, potatoes, some vegetable, ice cream, and put it all in there. He'd go back in that backstop, there was a little ball field by the cooking place by the mess hall, set there with that in between them; there were always three or four dogs hanging around there, he'd be eating out of it and the dogs would be eating out there. That's the way he'd sit there and eat.

Bruce Tessner: The dogs would eat out of it?

Bill Lemke: Yeah, they'd eat out of it and he was eating. Gosh.

Well, anyway, he had a BAR too. He carried all his spare magazines, he put them in a machine gun box, you know, pile them in there, almost as many as you could carry on there. And then he had on his, which we finally put on the one I had, instead of having just—you take the bipods off of there and put a—have the company carpenter put a handle in front on there so he could hold it like that to shoot, you know, because you were shooting most of the times just spraying areas, you know.

So we started moving out, same goddamn thing, and they had moved us over during the night. Before this, the night before I got with Eagle, they kept shifting the line down because they were losing so many guys. And, what was happening to us there was the guys were getting, they were getting shot there all the time, we were getting in that area where there was a field that you couldn't believe. That's why so many guys were getting killed in this area. And we were getting pushed over there. We gets in one hole there

and we thought, boy, Eagle didn't say anything, yeah, but it's good digging. So, we started digging like hell. It was a place where a big shell had landed in there so that there was a place around there pretty near as big as this room that had been like filled in. You know, you could tell a shell had hit in there and everything. We start digging. Jesus Christ, I got down there I thought boy, we'll get a good deep hole today. A pig's ass. Got down there and started getting greasy and start smelling and then saw some maggots on the down there. Here it was a place where the Japs had been burying their dead, maybe there's 20 or 30 of them in there and then they just push the dirt on them like that. Here we've got to stay in that goddamn hole that night. You've got to stay in the hole.

So we picked up enough rocks around, we were down this far, and that's where the last part of my poncho, I put my goddamn poncho on there. That's the last thing that kept—that's what they'd keep covering the dead Marines with is a poncho, so you wouldn't see them. You know, four, five days a guy gets just as black as a nigger. You couldn't tell whether they were black or white. And then they swell up sometimes, the pants, the seams of the pants let out.

And the worst sight that I ever can imagine seeing, you'd see these six-by trucks coming back when you're in, right back, like maybe 800 yards from, when you were in the line there in reserve, you see these trucks one after the other coming. First from a distance looked like they're carrying tree limbs and everything, old firewood, the Marines and their arms hanging out, just piled to the top, taking them back for grave registration, truck after truck. Figure out, say, 6,000 were killed there in thirty days, that's 200 every day on an average. Where they had—they'd take a bulldozer, make a big spot around six, seven foot deep, and then the guys would go along, it was all plotted out already on the map, and they'd dig down just in the sand, it was easy digging, they'd dig places for one body, one body. And then usually later on a guy from grave registration he came back in our outfit. I told you that one guy left, and his job was he'd hit their fingernail—their fingernails—if there was any doubt what their identity was, take a pipe with water, squirt it in there, take their fingerprint. And they'd usually put on tag in their mouth and keep the other for the so that when they dug them out in the skull there would be the tag, and they'd keep right on the chain. That's why you always knew on the chain that you put up there.

[End of tape 2, side B]

And when they went in on Iwo—see, he said that's 750 bags, that had what they figured they were going to lose there, they ended up over 5,000. They didn't have—they just wrap them in mattress covers, that's what they were wrapped up in.

Well, anyway, at the end there, we gets up there and there was three, four dead guys there. They didn't even get them out; they wanted us to get far back; they'd bring some more guys up there to take these dead out and they've been killed. So, we were supposed to get beyond there. But we were on the edge of that gorge.

So, knew it was a goddamn bad place, and gets to the edge here and all of a sudden you didn't even look over to see what it was down there yet, and Eagle says I'm going, that's what he said, that's the last I heard him say. He jumped over the edge here and I just see him disappear, and holy Christ, it opened up! There was a lot of—they were zinging around there going off the rock. That was the end of him. Goddamn it, I'm not going to jump like that, I'm going to see what's happening. So I goes up there, it's all stones like this and it was going down in the gorge there, you could look. I goes up there, and I just looked, I couldn't even really focus on anything there, and all of a sudden, boom went, and stuff hit me in the face like that, like rock dust and that. And made such a goddamn racket my ears were just, and I just went down like this. And I laid there a while. My goddamn head's ringing. I figured I'm dead, they got me in the head. I laid there. Later on we found out in some of these caves they had 20 millimeter machine guns down in there they took off of airplanes and they had them in places like this, because it must have been because there was a couple of guys that laid there they had holes in them like that. And they were shooting. And the only thing I think that saved me, for one thing, he was shooting on an angle across there, and the other thing I think it hit where there was explosive round. You know, they'd have like one that would be incendiary and then explosive, they'd have them in the belt, that's the way most of these plane things were. What saved me, if it would have been a solid round or something. But it just blew up there and that was it, went to pieces. But just lucky I didn't have my head over far enough. Most of it went back out, you know, or ricocheted up.

Well, anyway, I moved on a couple minutes there, like I said, thought I was dead, you know. Then looked down there and there was some bugs crawling around. Jesus Christ, one place there was like little wrens around that I saw one place. What the hell, they all should be dead. Everything was blew to hell, but they're still

there. Jesus Christ, if I'm dead I can't see those bugs. About that time a corporal there, his name was Hurt from Michigan, he come over there to see and I heard him scrambling across there and he said, Lem, are you hit, are you hit? And he shot a couple times down there and then he came over and I was laying like this and he came over to see if I was still—you know, I was like in a daze yet, you know. He come over there to see. When he looked over, fell right on top of me, his face like that. Blew his eyeballs out of his head. Goddamn eyeballs come out like that. When I looked up, that's when he got hit and went plunk and his eyeballs popped right out. And then he went down like that and, Jesus Christ. All of a sudden they stuck right pack up in his head. But they came all the way out. From when the bullet went through his head, expanded the brain and blew them out. Jesus Christ. I laid there a while and he's bleeding on me.

The night before we'd thrown grenades and I don't know if one of our guys did, or they were getting our stuff, a phosphorous grenade not fell aside of us there when I was in with Eagle there. And phosphorous come over. Lucky they were just, it was kind of, and we got little splatters. But burned holes. And I had a jacket on, it was just like they call them, what the hell they call them, it was canvas on it and it had a little lining in, that's what I wore because it would be cool nights and otherwise you just had like that overall jacket. So I wore that. But burned through the goddamn lining before I could get it off. The only thing, maybe you could throw sand on it. But they'll burn holes in you deep, you know. Both of us got burned, but nit that it burned us—it just burned our stuff before we got it off. So that's okay.

I'm laying there and I don't know how long I laid there, it couldn't have been too long. But he's bleeding on me and everything. Finally I could feel right after, I could feel some of his muscle jerking around, you know. Jesus, I didn't want—he was a pretty big kid too, he was about 175, 80 pounds. I took that guy and I just threw him. About that time the corpsman come up there, he knew somebody was hit up there, they called from sides: there's guys hit. He come up there, he come crawling up there. He says what's going on? I said don't come any further, you're going to get hit. And he said, what's happening—what happened to Eagle? I said, he's had it. He said, what about Hurt? I said, he's dead too. Well, he says, hey are you hit, are you hit? Ah, ah, ah, I was like incoherent. He put a tag on me and said you go back.

And before this, I got to tell you, just before we went up this last three days, don't know what the hell was wrong with me, this

Eagle, three days that I was with him, the son-of-a-bitch would always fall asleep on me. They're shooting flares off all the time, you know, and everything keeping it light around there so they couldn't sneak up on you. But there were times I'd wake up he'd be sleeping. He was out of it. He just wouldn't give a shit, you know. And like he had those two slight wounds, he could have got out of there. That would have been enough to get him out, because he got hit twice, even though it was only minor. But that bastard would sleep. Before the last day we were there, I thought that son-of-a-bitch sleeps on me tonight, I'll shoot him. It was just that way. Because I wasn't getting any sleep.

And then I'd eat a ration, you were only eating like one pack of rations, a C-ration and some crackers a day—I'd eat the ration, ten minutes later I'd have to shit and it would be like I puked. It would be just like the rations was just chewed up. I don't know if my stomach—and my piles had been bothering me a week or two before that, because you wouldn't shit for three days and then when you'd go, why your stool was so goddamn hard. So my piles were bothering me. They sent me back to Army hospital; that was back there a ways, so I went back there. A guy looked at me, where did you get it; I said I don't think I am hit. The doctor looked at me on the tag that the corpsman wrote out he said no more, no more front line for this guy, he said. The doctor said, you bet you've had it. So that was it. That was the end for me. I stayed in the hospital there a couple days and then I was in a reserve outfit in the back there. But by that time there were so—a day or two after that the whole company was pulled offline. Nothing there.

Bruce Tessner: This is close to the end, huh?

Bill Lemke: Yeah. Well, they weren't operational as an outfit any more, they were so goddamn shot up. There weren't enough people to fill the gaps. Then they waited another week; they just stayed there, and then they finally got the road built down in there where they could run tanks and there with flame throwers on. They just—see, they didn't have anything big down there like tank guns or anything, that they didn't have, because it was just all caves, and they burning them out. The engineers, even when we were around there, engineers would come up right behind you, you know, one day we were setting there and—fire in the hole!—and just a little ways away was a goddamn cave. They run a trailer-load of explosive in there and let that son-of-a-bitch go. The ground came up a foot if it come up any. You flew right up in the goddamn air. For half a day you couldn't hear. You know, that's the way they

were blowing them. They'd blow them up there just like crazy. That was about it.

So then it wasn't a week or so after that—well, they had one deal there, but I was in a different area where a hundred or 200 Nips went in there and they killed a lot of Air Force personnel. They went up right on the airfield. We were more down toward the beach. And they killed a lot of guys on that last drive that they made up there. You'll see it if you read the book.

Bruce Tessner: I did, I think I read about that. They infiltrated that.

Bill Lemke: That showed you they could get 200 guys through the lines and the was two, three lines there. But through holes, they had three.

Bruce Tessner: All those tunnels, yeah.

Bill Lemke: And then later I read one book there where they went back there two or three years later with a Jap that was captured on there, there were still Japanese on that island in the caves. And he went down—they don't know how many there were, but there were some down. They sent him down there and tried to talk them out and they wouldn't come out. And this was an area by Suribachi, so that had a lot of holes around too. And they were near, by the top there. I guess the guys that built the road there they could hear him talking and there was troops that were around there. They weren't killing anybody but they were stealing food to eat and that. But there was a lot of places there in the tunnel where they had a lot of stuff stored anyway. The main thing was water. Like they'd make sure that if guys got hit, take their canteens, because at night they'd come—that's the first thing they'd go is for the canteen. It was very little water on there. And they had places where they'd put pipe down in the ground and they'd have, run the pipe like by the beach, they'd run it under so salt water went in there, the heat of the ground, they had pipes coming up like that and then they'd have buckets down in the sand and water would come up there and condense, when it dripped down in there it would be fresh water, see, from the sea water.

They also, Sea-Bees back there, they put in a fresh shower, which I never got there, but they run pipe in the ground and then they made showers and pumped water out of the ocean and actually went under, but the goddamn water was so hot running in there the guys couldn't stand underneath there all the time, you know; you'd just go in and out, that's how hot it was.

And we went back, got aboard a ship and went back to Hawaii. We were so shot up, the guys that I slept with were, they were all gone. So, instead of having me sleep in the tent by myself, I was put in with three sergeants that were left there. Which, as a rule, in the Marine Corps the sergeants are all separate. They have separate mess and they also have—they don't hang around with the enlisted men, from corporal on, from a three-stripe sergeant on. That's another thing in that German Army: noncoms aren't with the men. They figure they get too familiar and then they don't listen to them. I don't know. But that's the way. And then, of course, the officers are separate from them too. Of course, there weren't anybody there. And then, for about three weeks or so, they had to wait for replacements, they had to be all reformed and everything; and I heard the sergeants, a lot of stuff there that they talked about, which was interesting.

Bruce Tessner: You mentioned Okinawa. You figured eventually they would ship you to Okinawa, right.

Bill Lemke: No. We were so beat up. All we did there was start training for Japan.

Bruce Tessner: Japan. See, when we left to go to Japan, we landed in Japan it would have been about the 22nd of September. That would have been about the time we were going to land there regardless. And when we landed we were all—you had all the ammo and everything, you were all ready to go.

Bruce Tessner: So you did go to Japan then, you landed there?

Bill Lemke: Oh, yeah, I was there nine months.

Bruce Tessner: I didn't know that.

Bill Lemke: Oh, yeah, nine months. And then you go around, like the beach we were supposed to land on had big naval guns up in the hills, and the beach we were supposed to land on, some of those, you'd go up in the hills there and it was rough going there—they didn't have decent roads or anything over there. But you'd go up with thermite grenades and explosives, like in these big guns, you'd throw a thermite grenade down the barrel and by the breach and that would burn holes right through. And then a lot of these guns that they had for shooting B-29's down there, they had a big motor and they were two 90's on there in a big thing. Shit, the shells were that high that they shot out of them. They were the latest, you know, that they shot at B-29.

And then for them you'd put—wrap the barrels and then you'd put a good charge on that electric motor and then blow that up and then go to the next one. All stuff like that. And one place there, there was about two, 300 of those torpedo boats there, they were wooden and they'd just have like five, 600 pound bomb in the front. They were supposed to—when Japan, they go thirty-four, forty-five miles an hour.

Bruce Tessner: Drive them into the side of a warship.

Bill Lemke: They were going to—they were mostly, not for so much battleships as troop transports and that, that's what they were for. Because they'd hit the side of a troop transport and those Kaiser boats there, they were built good, see, they'd go down in a hurry, those transports.

Bruce Tessner: I'm curious, when did you leave for Japan? Now, the Japanese surrendered in—

Bill Lemke: I'll tell you exactly when it was. We left Pearl Harbor September 1st.

Bruce Tessner: The Japanese had already surrendered then.

Bill Lemke: No. September 1st we left Pearl Harbor. They had surrendered, yeah. As we're pulling out with our transport—now this is the honest-to-God truth—we're pulling out with the transport, we're going by the *Arizona* there, and over the loudspeaker we got Mac Arthur talking on the *Missouri*, September 2nd, but followed us. September 2nd was in Japan; you go across the date line, they're a day ahead there, you gain a day. So, really, if you want to be ironical, we were going past where the war started when the war ended

Bruce Tessner: Isn't that something.

Bill Lemke: That really was something. The captain said, boys, we're going past where it started and it's ended.

Bruce Tessner: So, you were in Japan for about—

Bill Lemke: Nine months.

Bruce Tessner: What was the duty like there basically?

Bill Lemke: A lot. First of all one, one time a guy says to me, there was a corporal there, and he had to go around and check all the school around there. And he kind of like me, he said hey, do you want to ride along and get rid of this shitty guard duty and all that stuff? He says, come along with me, you'll be my guard. And, I said, I don't have to drive the Jeep, do I, because I didn't want to drive, I never had a car. No, he said, I'll do the driving, he said, you just set there with your rifle.

So we go around, and he could talk pretty good Japanese. And we go to these schools, mostly high schools, and he'd say what were their teachers now that the war is over, they didn't want too many old Jap military men in there, they wanted to keep that military down. It used to be in their schools they had like two or three officers, they could be, they try to have two or three officers in there teaching the kids all military stuff, see, and they wanted to eliminate that. They'd go and have them make out forms and that and then we'd go to the next one and go around. That was a good duty for a while. Covered a lot of them around there.

And I was surprised—their science, like biology, was way ahead of ours. You know, the Japs are good at dissecting and everything. They have big cases there with all dissected animals, humans—all that stuff. Really, it was pretty near like high school would be much as like a college course, I don't know about, but it would be, this guy said it would be equivalent to college in the United States as far as biology went. They were up on that stuff.

Bruce Tessner: Which island were you on?

Bill Lemke: Kiosha.

Bruce Tessner: Kiosha? I don't know that. That's not the main island.

Bill Lemke: No, that's the southernmost. It was—I went over all. I never got up on Anshow. But Kiosha there on that southern part of that, Kanoya, we were on that, and that was their biggest, that would be like Pensacola is in this country—naval planes and that—and we were on that one quite a while. Did a lot of guard duty on that. That's another place where I bought a ring deal like that. Take us around with a ton and a half, Christ, the airfield was from here across the lake there, big, flat, and there would be around there a lot of munitions like bombs and all that stuff around there. And, I had to guard that stuff until it got hauled. For a long time, there, all we did is Japs would do the work, and there would be like twenty Japs and one guy— [gap in tape]

Bill Lemke:

They take it down, throw it in boats, and then take it out about ten miles and dump it in the ocean. That's what they did with most—that's swords and everything. And, well, there at Kanoya that one time, there was a ridge along there about like the ledge out here, you know, and somebody, one of the officers there, all caves in there, everything from big military shells, naval shells to I don't know what-not. Anyway, so places there was hit; some of that naval ammunition it would be, it looked like plastic, like solenoids and that, all holes in like the cylinder on a pistol, or a revolver, I mean, and that was like the powder that they'd use in these bags, that's how coarse the kernels were, you know. And one day they decided they were going to blow up a lot of that stuff, they had about three or [four?] caves wired all along there. Jesus Christ, we were in a Jap barracks then. There was one hallway went down the middle and then there was rooms on each side and then it had all windows in. Well, they were smart enough to take the windows out because they might break. Might. There was a window that ran along the hallway too, because they could see along the hallway too, you know, we took that window out. I was sitting up on the sill there where that window was in the middle. I thought at least I was smart enough if someone comes I'm not going to be on, most of them crowded around. Jesus Christ, they blew that up and it was more than what they thought. More than what they thought in there. That whole goddamn thing erupted. And, if the glass would have been in anyplace around there, it broke the glass. It broke glass for ten miles away. And then there was all kinds of shells and that, like artillery shells and shells that were like for anti-aircraft and that. You go by later on and all the farmers would have a pile like that beside their field that they picked out of their fields about ten miles around. That was the end of that shit. They never knew, hey, that must have been so full of stuff that—it was just like an earthquake.

Bruce Tessner:

So then you left Japan after nine months and you went back to Hawaii—

Bill Lemke:

See, what happened in Japan, the Fifth Division deactivated it, and the way they did that, the Second Division was over in Japan. The Second Division landed at Nagasaki. What they did, they took all—see, it was all points. They took all the veterans that had high points and all the guys that had points, put them in the Fifth Division, and they sent that division home as the Fifth Division. All the guys that had low points, which, of course, all the young guys, they put them in the Second Division. I ended up in the Second Division in Japan there after two, three months. About two

months all those guys that are the appointments, they were sent home.

Bruce Tessner: So, you didn't come back until 194—

Bill Lemke: '46. Yeah, in July.

Bruce Tessner: So you came back home. And did you muster out right away, and where did you—did you stop in Hawaii on the way back?

Bill Lemke: There's another—went through the Panama Canal. The way they had it set up then, everybody east of the Mississippi was shipped out, you were taken out at the Great Lakes. But, we landed in Norfolk, of course. And they went by train over to—so I got to see more there too. And all the guys—I would have rather went on the West Coast, because the guys that were going on the West Coast, they went on an aircraft carrier, because that was the home base for aircraft—they had a good deal. We went on a goddamn banana boat again.

Then we went—at Panama we had to wait for a time to get through there, you know, there's a lot of traffic through there. We were just off—one of these guys that—we're about three, four miles from shore, over the bank they'd go, they'd swim in to go on liberty, take some plastic and put over their clothes and go bare ass and swim in. Probably some guys who can't hold them down. Yeah.

While I was with those sergeants there, they were talking about, they had one sergeant at Pendleton there, he taught knife-fighting and stuff like that, and also these picks and that, he'd throw them around all the time, you could throw them, and he had a target there, he'd stick one in there all the time. He was like one of these odd fighters—he was an odd duck. Well, anyway, he taught knife-fighting, take a knife like this and a blade like this and you get one in each hand, you know. Every time if you want—you get a guy that's good with judo or anything like that, take a knife away from you just like that. But it's all wrist-holds. You've got to grab the wrist to do that. If you've got that knife when he goes to grab the wrist, it's tough shit. And then what you do, all you do is, Americans who are good boxers, you go after them like you're boxing. Like, if I've got this knife and it's at an angle like this and I go and hit you, I don't have to hit you with my fist, just so I just miss you, your throat is cut. And then, if I'd even miss you, I can jab you this way. And, if you grab this arm, I've got this one. This guy, they claim he used to be a paratrooper, and that's why he was

like—he was great for killing where they don't make any noise. And his boots he had like a thin knife without a handle; he had one in each boot, like special made. So that's okay. They said one time he was stationed in Manila in the Philippines; there was one part of Manila there was like a ghetto. And they said that there wasn't a white man that ever went down in there that they didn't come out and they either stayed down there, they were dead, or if they come out, money was gone; they'd take everything they wanted from there, you had two choices. If you tried to fight for it. Well, he made a bet with some guy, sailors around there; they said, boy, you go down there, you're a dead man—especially if you go by yourself. They had SP's down in there, they had like Marines that would patrol down there. So some of the guys said he's going down there so that if really worse got to worse, that there would be somebody to help him out, you know.

He goes in this one dive, supposed to be the worst one in the bunch, goes in there, had a couple, and he said usually they'd nail him in the toilet. Like, when a guy went to the toilet, they'd corner you. Went in the toilet, four of these Flips come in there behind him, they're all great knife-fighters you know. I guess when it got all over—and it didn't take five minutes—one of them staggered out and fell on the floor and bled to death and the other three were dead right in there. He come out he had a couple cuts on him, but that was it.

About that time the SP's [Special Police?] came in there and said, what's going on? Oh, he said he had a little ruckus in there. He was something else again. He was tough.

Bruce Tessner: So you went to Norfolk and then to Great Lakes.

Bill Lemke: And then, that's where they cashiered us out.

Bruce Tessner: I get you. Okay, that would have been you said in July—

Bill Lemke: July, '46.

Bruce Tessner: I got to ask you about what you did right after that. I was told that you went back to high school.

Bill Lemke: I did for a little while, and then they had these GED tests. They'd give you a GED test on English and history and everything. I always took good courses in high school like that; I took chemistry and English and geometry and all that; so they were nothing to do.

Bruce Tessner: I was telling somebody about this. I said I understand Bill went back to high school after he came back in July, and September—

Bill Lemke: Yeah, that's right.

[End of tape 3, side A]

Bruce Tessner: —but I said I can just see some English teacher there assigning a traditional English paper, you know, what did you do last summer, you know, my God. You could have just wrote I was in the war.

Bill Lemke: Yeah.

Bruce Tessner: What was it like when you went back to high school? Were there a lot of guys that did that?

Bill Lemke: There was quite a few. I'd say in that class there was maybe twenty, twenty-five or so, yeah. And then that GED test come out, they all took it. Well, you'd get your diploma, and some of them with that diploma you still were eligible to go to college then if you wanted to. But I wasn't set for that.

Then my uncle wanted my brother and I to run a tavern for him there.

Bruce Tessner: Sure, Uncle Charlie.

Bill Lemke: So we went in there for a while, yeah. And I didn't like that. I got out of there and I got to be an apprentice bricklayer.

Bruce Tessner: I wanted to clarify one thing about going back to before you even went in the service. You said you went to tech school—

Bill Lemke: Yeah, vocational school they called it.

Bruce Tessner: Sure. But you didn't go—you joined in August of '44 and you would have been a senior that year, right?

Bill Lemke: Yeah, that's right.

Bruce Tessner: So you didn't take the junior year of high school?

Bill Lemke: Yeah, yeah, I got done with the junior year of high school. Just the senior year that I didn't. I would have graduated in '45.

Bruce Tessner: But when would you have been in the vocational school, from when to when? I'm not sure. If you got out of your junior year in the summer of '44, you know, you'd have been through with your junior year of high school and you went in in August.

Bill Lemke: That would have been '43 it would have been. It wouldn't have been '44. '43 is when—because I quit my junior year at the end of the junior year.

Bruce Tessner: Okay, that's what I mean, you were off that whole year—

Bill Lemke: Yeah, it was the year I went there.

Bruce Tessner: I see. I understand. Sure. So if you would have stayed in high school, you would have been a senior in 1944 then—

Bill Lemke: No.

Bruce Tessner: While you were in vocational school, that would have been your senior year.

Bill Lemke: That's right.

Bruce Tessner: Yeah, it still amazes me your story about going in so young, you know, and then coming out and going back in.

Bill Lemke: Well, when you're young and foolish, see. That's what they like. They like young guys. Because like now these armies now, they've got a family and three kids, you can't expect anybody to stick their neck out that much.

Bruce Tessner: When you're a teenager you're invulnerable.

Bill Lemke: That's right. And not only that, even the guys that were over, hey, at that time I think the average age in the Marine Corps was 21.

Bruce Tessner: Even a lot of the young officers and all those were.

Bill Lemke: Yeah, most of the old guys in the outfit were old gunnies and they were all staffs and gunnies and that, sergeants. They were the ones that were in it for the career, you know.

Bruce Tessner: I just wondered if I ask you this: In general your feelings about the Iwo Jima campaign. Was it worth it, was it, you know?

Bill Lemke: It was worth it, but they could have done it different. One thing like you say there, they should have bombarded it a lot longer. They had the stuff—they were getting too goddamn eager there, you know. And, they figure on there we lost 25,000 casualties. But, at the same time, they figured they saved that many in the Air Force.

Bruce Tessner: From the B-29's.

Bill Lemke: We did it for the—they figured the B-29's ditched and came in there that couldn't find would have been twenty-five. How many were on a B-29, twelve? At least twelve.

Bruce Tessner: There's at least ten.

Bill Lemke: I think there was twelve at one time. Gees, every time one of them, and look what it cost. This way they could fix them up there and everything and then ship them on.

Bruce Tessner: What a price they paid for that island!

Bill Lemke: That kind of equalized out, see. Because here before that they'd go off of Saipan and they had these airfields on Iwo Jima, which was 600 miles, it was in between there. And they'd pick up on their radar they're coming. So, they'd send their planes up and they'd just harass them. They wouldn't go in really for the kill because, but they'd harass. And, if any of them even starting out would have a little trouble with their plane, they'd knock them down. And then they'd go to Japan, bomb. On the way back they had to come right over it. What would they do, they'd be all ready, they'd be all ready, they'd see them coming back, then they'd pick off all the cripples and everything and that's where they were nailing them there. A lot of those raids there, Christ, they'd go out with 300 planes and they'd lose forty or fifty.

Bruce Tessner: The Japanese mainland would be alerted, of course, by the radar—

Bill Lemke: Right, they had that jump of 600 miles too. So it was rough both ways there.

Bruce Tessner: I think the, didn't the brass, they knew—you talk about this rumor that they were going to be there, it was going to take them three days, but I don't know if the brass felt that it was going to be that duration. I guess, you know, the scuttlebutt is always the thing in the military, you know.

Bill Lemke: One thing, they prepped you good. You always had good preparations. These are all installations that they knew, that they knew were there, but there was so much underground and that. But that's—and you'd have, they'd show you maps, tell you where to go. Actually, as far as the Marine Corps went, even to the lowest private, you knew as much as the general did as far as what you were going to accomplish. They were good that way. Where again I read some Army misfits, they didn't know what the hell, they didn't know the name of the place they were going to, you know what I mean. That's a hell of a way to go, you know. But they were good that way.

Bruce Tessner: They didn't tell you you were going to Iwo Jima until you were on the boat going there, right?

Bill Lemke: We kind of had an idea.

Bruce Tessner: You probably knew. The Japanese certainly knew.

Bill Lemke: The goddamn people in Hawaii all knew it.

Bruce Tessner: Everybody but the ones that were going. It was the one logical step—

Bill Lemke: That's right.

Bruce Tessner —and the Japanese knew it too. I was reading about their defense, “Karabachi”, the general who was in charge of the defense, made sure that they built all these runways and caves and so on, it was totally underground, just a warren of—

Bill Lemke: That's one sword I got on Iwo Jima, that long one. The short one I picked up in Japan. That flag, there was, at Kanoya, that was that base, naval base, they had a small flat-top in there, the name of it was J-u-n-o, Juno. That was in the carrier force that went up to the Aleutians when they had that raid at Midway. That was that small carrier that went with that carrier force. It wasn't a big one, it was what they call a “baby flat” [U.S. Navy's escort carriers, jeep carriers] you know. It wasn't a very big one. Well, that didn't have a nick on it. That never got in any real battle that it got shot at. And that was in the harbor there at Kanoya, that base. There she sit. And we went all over there looking around. Christ, those places were so, because Japs weren't very big, and I'm not either, but boy, you had to watch your head on there. So we're poking around there one day, by the fantail there there was kind of a locker there and it had a hell of a time opening it up. Here that flag

was folded up in there. I never said anything to anybody. I could fold it real—folded it up, put it in my pants and that, otherwise if you would let anybody know you had it, first of all, some goddamn officer would hit. That's the only one I ever saw like that. That was for off the fantail, that's a battle, that's a big one.

Bruce Tessner: That's a flag for a ship, yeah. My father-in-law brought one back. He was in Japan. He brought one back; it was autographed by all the men in his Army unit. It wasn't that big, but it was that style.

Bill Lemke: See, that's on a bed, on the upstairs bed. I put that on there just before I sold that stuff. That was a good deal there.

Bruce Tessner: It's a Pearson flag, but it's beautiful.

Bill Lemke: This Boyd one time, he was—see, that short, that short saber that I had there, I got that on, they had piles of them. If I'd known what to look for, I could have got some really good stuff and didn't know what to do.

But this was a short one for a small man. But it had engraving all up and down each side of the blade you know. So, anyway, there was a Jap over at G and L and then Lloyd took it over there and he got it. But it was hard for him. Because this was, the characters in there would be like from old, the old English. Well, to begin with, it says on the—the blade is twenty-one and a half inches long, which they usually had it so the blade was about four, five inches from the ground, so that guy wasn't very big that had this, maybe a little under five feet, you know, which. It says the guy "Tumori" made this blade 12th or 13th century. That's pretty old. Two feet, eight inches long. Heavy sword and the name of the sword was what that guy who told me. Anyway, on the engraving the way he said, it says how sharp I am. Slice neck like grapevine, slice triple like strong paws, hard as like iron stone, diamond meet enemy like arrow. That's what it said on one side. And on the one side it said horizontal like wind, vertical like forest, spread bunch like fire, steady like mountain. That's what it said on that side. And then on the tang, I took the tang then we had a book there that it told about what the deal was on these swords, they were like proof-marked. And this one had proof-marks like it shows the different blade cuts that they make. And this one was proof-marked that you hit them in the shoulder and it would stop at the hip, it went through. Then they had one that would just cut the head off, and then one from another side. And this one had the proof-marks that it actually, they'd kill convicts or even use them on cadavers and then they can mark that on there. It would just being like when

you buy a shotgun and then there's a proof-mark on there that it will stand 50,000 rounds per square inch pressure. That's the way. So that one had been proof-marked. Either it killed people and then was marked for these different cuts.

Bruce Tessner: So, speaking of weapons, you basically, you carried an M-1, right.

Bill Lemke: Started out with a Gerand rifle and then they give me—I carried a BAR.

Bruce Tessner: That's right, you mentioned that, that you and the Eagle both, yeah.

Bill Lemke: See, as people would get hit, they'd want to keep heavy weapons up there if they could. And the thing with that was there were so few getting left that half the guys had Browning Automatic Rifles. There weren't enough guys.

Bruce Tessner: They had a lot of firepower.

Bill Lemke: That's right.

Bruce Tessner: But they were heavy to carry.

Bill Lemke: Eighteen pounds.

Bruce Tessner: And then, you had to carry all the clips, too.

Bill Lemke: Ammo, twenty rounds in the clip and they carried ten of them, so that's twenty pounds.

Bruce Tessner: Well, what else can we talk about here? Do you have any other questions?

So, you came back home and went back to high school. How long did you go to high school before the GED, just a month or so?

Bill Lemke: I think it was just about a month or so. And then all the guys that were there, you know, you were with young kids; what the hell, you didn't feel like going to school!

Bruce Tessner: I bet you felt out-of-place.

Bill Lemke: Yeah.

Bruce Tessner: I imagine Hilda and your dad were sure glad to see you home. Was Marv—

Bill Lemke: He got out.

Bruce Tessner: —he beat you home.

Bill Lemke: Yeah, he got out ahead of me.

Bruce Tessner: Because the war in Europe ended before the war in Japan.

Bill Lemke: I was marked in the 27th Replacement Draft there.

We had magazines and that too, some good books that they put out on there.

Bruce Tessner: I got this book on tape, believe it or not, from the library, and I started listening to it; I was going to listen to it on the way up to Green Bay.

Bill Lemke: This here was interesting in the back. Here's what I was telling you about this medal of honor. Here one corporal, smothered grenade; PFC, smothered grenade; PFC, smothered grenade; PFC, private, smothered grenade; PFC—

Bruce Tessner: I was commenting on that to Marge. I had one book at home, it's got pictures of all those guys—a gallery at the end of the book. And I was looking at that and all those guys jumping on grenades, and said, “gees”—

Bill Lemke: This is one of the best because it gives the Japanese command that was on there too, it gives all their, their—they went through the records. A lot of these books aren't that thorough.

Bruce Tessner: This picture of you, when was this, before, after?

Bill Lemke: That was in Japan. That's the only chance—I and another kid, his name was Cody, we went in town there, and a Jap photographer took this picture, I guess. We got three, four pictures for a pack of cigarettes. He had a regular studio, you know.

Bruce Tessner: Well, you were a handsome guy, I tell you.

Bill Lemke: And, that's the only uniform you had. That was the uniform of the day, just a little sweater, you didn't have much over there. I never did get the dress blues. I never even went on—

Bruce Tessner: I was going to ask you: You came back, and when did you take up masonry? First you started out doing that when you got back?

Bill Lemke: First, when I first got back they had a, in one part of G and L there to the west of Military Road that had it, it was Barrow and Sealy, they made washers in there from Ripon, but that's what they were called then. Barrow and Sealy, and before that, that place had made shells, they made like, yeah. And so I worked there, 75 cents an hour, and they put these washing machines, they were all, you just assemble them there. And all the goddamn foreman and that were farm kids, farmers that didn't go in service. They were with—that was a son of a bitchin' place, I'll tell you. These guys that were in a lot and then these goddamn little assholes were the boss. They were making twice—they were making a dollar and a half, two bucks an hour, you were making 75 cents.

Bruce Tessner: So you wanted out of there.

Bill Lemke: I wanted out of there. That was no place.

Bruce Tessner: You took an apprenticeship, then, I imagine with bricklayers; you did have to do an apprenticeship.

Bill Lemke: First, I started out as a laborer there, after I left the—I worked in the tavern for a while, and that was no life either.

Bruce Tessner: Well, Marv was there longer.

Bill Lemke: Oh, yeah, he stayed there. See, it was going to be—my uncle was going to leave the place to the two of us, and I—if he stayed he'd get it, and two guys couldn't make anything out of there. And it's a son-of-a-bitch, that tavern.

Bruce Tessner: I still remember 1948 I think it was, Wesley came running over to our house; it was in the middle of the night, practically, "get up," "get up!" That's when we went over and the place was, the old place was just going up in smoke. It was one of the great fires we ever saw. And, yeah, I can remember that.

But, then you said, you eventually became an apprentice.

Bill Lemke: I worked as a laborer then, and then one day one guy says to me why don't you try for the goddamn Hmong out there, those sons-of-a-bitches. That's another thing should never have been over here. The CIA, thank you CIA. Not only that, my brother keeps

saying, “Jeez, we had people behind us, why didn’t we win that war?” I had a guy I used to work with, his son was over in Vietnam. And he was in the place where they’d take them carbines—‘cause they couldn’t shoot a goddamn big rifle—carbines and all that stuff and food. All they wanted was the food, actually. Taking the carbines and everything like that and they were going to help them with the Vietnamese. He said about a month later, they go back there—they’d give them about food for a month—the goddamn (in falsetto: Aaaaah, (unintelligible)). The sons of bitches turned around and were selling carbines to the Vietnamese. That’s our great people. I heard they were supposed to be fighting with them when they were five years old. Up my ass, tell me another one. How come they didn’t kick the Vietnamese out of there then if they were such warriors? Goddamn rat eaters.

Bruce Tessner: Let’s see, you were a bricklayer and that. And when did you marry Joan? How long was it after you—

Bill Lemke: ’55.

Bruce Tessner: So you were established then as a mason by then.

Bill Lemke: Yeah.

Bruce Tessner: You could afford to get married. I don’t know if we need to talk anymore here, if you’ve got any other closing comments.

Bill Lemke: No, I think that’s it. There’s Marty. There’s Leeman. I was in the hole with him for a long time, that guy. Here’s that Bill Hurt.

Bruce Tessner: Yeah, these are all killed-in-action, I see.

Bill Lemke: There’s Eagle. That’s the end of him. Then there was a good friend of mine, Sergeant Toft. He was a good egg. He was too tall. He had a neck that long. Goddamn it, that neck stuck out, too much there to shoot out.

Bruce Tessner: I never did find out. The head of the Second Battalion that you were in was Antonelli, I believe his name was. Was he killed?

Bill Lemke: No, he was the First Battalion. Antonelli was killed, yeah.

Bruce Tessner: That’s what I was wondering—oh, he was First Battalion, I think he was.

Bill Lemke: I think he was First Battalion.

Bruce Tessner: I think he's listed—the one I saw he was listed—

Bill Lemke: There was John Law, they died and there's George Lightner. And Lofris and Lewinski. Then there was an Edward Lemke there, he was from Milwaukee. I just happened to see his name when I went up in the graveyard one day. One of the guys come, he says, Jesus, Lem, I thought you were dead, I just saw your grave. See, you just call everybody by their last name.

Bruce Tessner: Is this—oh, this guy died of wounds. I see, okay.

Bill Lemke: See, that's the way they did it, and then here's all the wounded in action. I didn't mark, there was quite a few guys. But a lot of them that were wounded in action they never came back either. Hit pretty bad or something.

Bruce Tessner: Well, I was just going to close. The best quote that I've ever heard about Iwo Jima was by Nimitz, the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific, the Navy.

Bill Lemke: (Inaudible).

Bruce Tessner: He said for those who served on Iwo Jima, uncommon valor was a common virtue, he said. I guess that's inscribed on the memorial in Washington, D.C. I guess we can end on that, huh?

Bill Lemke: Yeah.

Bruce Tessner: We've got to thank Bill for putting up with us here and recording this whole thing. I know it was rough in parts, but I think we really appreciate it. I think your family will too, your ancestors will appreciate it.

Bill Lemke: For a long, long time I couldn't talk about it. Who cares?

Bruce Tessner: I know, I can understand why. We'll end then. Thank you very much, Bill.

[End of Interview]