

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
Maurice Leon
Field Artillery Sergeant, Army, World War II
2006

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Leon, Maurice, (1911-2007), Oral History Interview, 2006

User copy, 2 sound cassettes (ca. 79 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master copy, 2 sound cassettes (ca. 79 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder)

Abstract:

Maurice Leon, a Madison, Wisconsin resident, discusses his service in the 33rd Infantry Division, 122nd Field Artillery Battalion in the Pacific during World War II. Leon reports he was born in Chicago but moved to Rockford (Illinois) at age eight. His father, a salesman, moved the family often. Leon graduated from high school in Milwaukee (Wisconsin) and completed some post-graduate education before attending the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he worked in the Law Library. The day Pearl Harbor was attacked, Leon recalls listening to Roosevelt's famous "Day of Infamy" speech on a radio in the Law Library, with other staff and students. Leon explains he was drafted in 1941 but deferred until spring semester ended. In 1942, he was inducted into the Army and sent to Fort Lewis (Washington) for training with the 122nd Field Artillery Battalion. Leon describes training in the cold in Yakima (Washington) followed by extreme heat in the Mojave Desert (California). He mentions the Army was looking for people who had gone to college and made him a Sergeant. Leon tells of his first assignment on Kauai (Hawaii), defending the island against Japanese submarines. After nine months there, Leon's Field Artillery Battalion was shipped to New Guinea where they built a base for another outfit. Leon mentions he suffered from diarrhea and exhaustion due to a lack of salt. After constructing the base, the battalion was transferred up the coast to Finschhafen (New Guinea). Leon calls Finschhafen "an interesting area" and comments on the aboriginal people who lived there. Next, he describes engaging in a skirmish in Dutch New Guinea, along with the Marines, to prevent the Japanese from reaching an island where a U.S. airbase was stationed. In New Guinea, Leon discusses an unusual method of training infantry to get used to fighting with artillery: his field artillery battalion would position themselves twenty yards away from the infantry and fire on the Japanese, and the infantry would advance and then quickly retreat. Leon criticizes the infantry who replaced the 33rd Division in New Guinea for failing to hold onto the territory. After New Guinea, Leon reports General MacArthur ordered his unit to the Philippines to help with the Baguio Campaign. Leon reveals he did not "have a high regard for MacArthur" but admits he had a good mind for strategy. Leon outlines his trek through the Philippines: they landed in Lingayen Gulf, made their way to Manila, and then went north into the mountains following other artillery battalions who had arrived earlier. Leon unfavorably characterizes the Japanese artillery, saying "It wasn't howitzers. They didn't know how to lob it...so [the shell] would pop up in the air." He recalls arriving in Baguio City (Philippines) over the mountains and finding it destroyed except for a cathedral which was being used as a hospital. Leon touches upon interactions between American soldiers and the Baguio people, an indigenous tribe. He mentions the Baguio brought supplies for the Army in large baskets over the mountains. Also, Leon tells how a communication unit set up trip wire and defenses around his camp, and a caribou got caught by

the barbed wire, angering the farmer who owned it. Next, Leon reports that his battalion went to Lagoya (Philippines) for rest and relaxation; however, General MacArthur called them back to round up Japanese deserters in the Intercoast Northbay. Leon clarifies that his battery was detached from the battalion and accompanied a Filipino Army Division commanded by American officers. He describes setting up artillery in rice paddies near a small town called Cervantes. Leon portrays the Filipinos as scared of the Japanese Army and claims they refused to attack until the white officers threatened them. In contrast, Leon mentions another indigenous group, the Igorot people, "hated the Japanese" and were hard fighters. Leon spends time discussing radio activated shells that would explode on the way down the mountain, targeting Japanese soldiers or other obstacles in their path; however, Leon complains that clouds also set the shells off, making them less useful. Leon tells two stories about a friend from law school who served in many of the same places as Leon and who had three ships bombed out from under him. This friend was present for the battle of Borneo (Indonesia) where, due to poor coordination, an Australian cruiser was destroyed by Japanese ships while American dive bombers were engaged with Japanese planes above. Leon also comments that this friend, who was Jewish, got into a fistfight with a commanding officer who made antisemitic remarks. Leon characterizes his friend as feisty and inspiring. Returning to his own experience, Leon mentions he expected to be part of the Invasion of Japan and had just left the Philippines when he learned the atomic bomb was dropped. He outlines MacArthur's original plan for invading Japan which involved using his Infantry Division and the 122nd Field Artillery as bait to distract the Japanese from the real invasion from the North. As Leon explains: "we would be the suckers." Leon describe landing in Osaka (Japan) and traveling in old trucks to Hamiji, where his battalion took over a former Japanese naval academy. He comments on how dark the cities were without electricity. Leon poignantly describes convoying at night through a city that had been completely burned out, seeing only two lights from Japanese gendarmes carrying lanterns. Leon touches upon relations between the Americans soldiers and Japanese civilians. He knows of one U.S. soldier arrested for fraternizing with a Japanese woman, which the Army forbade. The soldier was forced to reenlist for one year as punishment. Leon also tells of troops in Hawaii dating "AJAs"-- Americans of Japanese Ancestry. Leon clarifies he spent nine months in Hawaii, nine months in New Guinea, nine months in Philippines, and a couple months in Japan. Upon his homecoming, Leon states he had a stomach ulcer that went uncured for four years. He mentions how his wife Dorothy helped him through his illness by cooking eggs and bland food. Leon states he finished college at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and then used the G.I. Bill to attend Law School at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he once again worked in the law library. Leon had a long career as Director of the Law Library. He recalls witnessing protests and arrests on campus in the 1960s during the Vietnam War and tells of sending his staff home early because tear gas was entering the building.

Biographical Sketch:

Leon (1911-2007) was born in Chicago but grew up in Rockford (Illinois) and Milwaukee (Wisconsin). He attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison but was drafted into the Army in 1942 before he graduated. Leon served in Hawaii, New Guinea, the Philippines, and Japan with the 33rd Infantry Division, 122nd Field Artillery Battalion. After the war, he finished his B.A. at UW-Milwaukee and attended law school at UW-Madison, later becoming the Director of the Law Library. In 1982, Leon retired from the law library at the age of 71 but stayed busy taking classes at UW in etching and printmaking.

Interviewed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2006.
Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2006.
Transcript edited and abstract written by Darcy I. Gervasio, 2009.

Interview Transcript:

John: This is John Driscoll, and today is April 5, 2006. And this is an oral history interview Morry Young at his home on the west side of Madison, and Morry, thanks an awful lot for agreeing to the interview. Why don't we start at the very beginning? When and where were you born?

Maurice: Well, my name is Maurice Leon. I am ninety-four years old. I was born in Chicago, Illinois, and lived there until I was about eight years old. And then went to Rockford, Illinois. And after a while I followed my father around, who became a traveling salesman. So I ended up with a number of different cities and so I ended up in thirteen different grade schools and four high schools. So anywhere from, let's see, I am trying to think of some.

John: While you are thinking, what is your date of birth, Maurice?

Maurice: July 27, 1911.

John: Okay.

Maurice: I went to high school in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. That is where I graduated. And then I went on, I picked up a partial other graduate degree and ended up working at the Law School, at Madison, Wisconsin, until I was drafted. In, I think it was, what the heck, 1941. Or so. One of many students who was drafted out of school at that time. And eventually after I got out of the Army, after a quote "career" there, and I went back to law school, and got a degree and became the Director of the Law Library.

John: Oh. Oh.

Maurice: And so I...

John: Was that here in Madison?

Maurice: In Madison, yes.

John: Oh, wow, that was great.

Maurice: Well, I was drafted in, I think it was 1941. It was after Pearl Harbor, and I remember that quite vividly at the law school.

John: Tell me about that. About Pearl Harbor Day.

Maurice: Well, you see, we were, somebody had a radio. We didn't have television then. And when Roosevelt was going to give his famous speech, "A day of infamy," why, some of us got up, up in the law school in a room that had a radio, and the place was just full of fellows. That is all we had at the school, a bunch of fellows and professors. Listening to Franklin Roosevelt's famous "Day of Infamy" speech, and we knew what was going to happen then. So I was going to school, taking my undergraduate degree, and then I got a deferment of my draft. Everybody was drafted. Got my deferment, which lasted through the spring of the next year and, by then, I knew that going into the Army was just a matter of time. So instead of waiting until the fall of the next year, I think it was '42, I told my draft board to draft me. And so I was picked up and, where was the draft board? Oh, down Chicago way. And I ended up on a train and got to Fort Lewis, Washington. And I was in the 122nd Field Artillery. Fortunately, not the infantry, which I didn't want to get into. Knowing the difference there. We had a period of training from the cold winter firing range out at Yakima, Washington. It was twenty below zero cold. And then somebody in the Army who knew everything decided it would be interesting to see what would happen to take an infantry division - we were attached to the infantry - and send them down to a warm, hot climate, like the Mojave Desert. So we were sent down to the Mojave Desert, which I thought was just wonderful because it was so warm. I was with some skills, ability, at the fire direction center where I was. In the artillery, which we would take information given to us from the aerial observers orally and pass it on to the 105 howitzers.

John: Okay.

Maurice: They called them guns. And would fire the battery. And we developed this skill doing that. We had what was called a "slip stick." It was something like the slip stick they had in college for the fellows that were taking, a slide rule. That's what it was. A slide rule. But it was adapted to artillery use.

John: I see.

Maurice: So the first thing I knew after we got out of the Mojave Desert, which was very nice, and it was dry. And so the heat was bearable. And we got on a ship and ended up, our first ship, to Hawaii. The island of Kauai. Where for nine months we defended the island against the attack by Japanese submarines. Believe it or not. So in order to keep the island from being swamped by the Japanese, they used the artillery, controlling the harbors at Kauai. Willi-Willi was one of them, I believe, and Hanapepe was another, I believe. And then we got so tired of this island, little did we know, we called it "The Rock." They put us on a ship to New Guinea. Quite a difference.

John: When about was this?

Maurice: It was nine months. I forget.

John: Early 1942. [Incorrect. It must be late 1942 or early 1943]

Maurice: It would be. So we ended up in New Guinea, and instead of doing artillery work, they had us constructing somebody's base camp, in a swamp.

John: Okay.

Maurice: I perspired so much I felt so peculiar, having diarrhea, too, so the doctor gave me the kind of medicine they give babies who are having diarrhea, which worked very well. And when I found out what was happening, I told them how hot I was feeling, and he said, "Oh, you are running short of salt." And there was a big, on that Lyster bag, I think that is what it was called. Where you got your drinking water from. There is a container of salt tablets. "Take a handful of them." So I did. And immediately I felt a lot better. But after we had been mucking around there with this so-called setting up the tents and everything for somebody. Which made us a little bit irked. We were suddenly shifted away and further up the base to Finschhafen. And up the coast from Finschhafen, well, we stayed there not doing anything, waiting for some direction or orders to move. After a few months there, it was quite pleasant, we went back. I got a cook didn't want to make any tea, which I wanted. He gave me a whole pound, or two pounds, of tea leaves and so I made tea myself in the tent. So we ended up further up the coast, a short period of time. A couple of months. Then the interesting area. The only people around there were the natives, who were black. And the women, too. And the women didn't wear anything above their waist. At least, what did they call them. That was the black people who lived on New Guinea. And we loaded into a small troop carrier, a landing craft, and we ended up in Dutch New Guinea, which is way up the coast of New Guinea. We were to relieve a big outfit that was going into the Philippines. And where we would eventually go. And so they had all of these heavy artillery pieces. Even ones that they defined as rifles, the big ones. And big 105, 155 howitzers. And so they gave us some extra 155 howitzers which we turned over to our, what was the name of that outfit of ours that provided the supplies? And we learned what we had to do. We had to keep these Japanese away from us. Because what had happened was that right off the coast of where we were then, was an island that was an airbase, one of MacArthur's air fleet. And in order to get this base and clear it from attacks, they had to remove the Japanese division that was parked there. Well, we were put so there was a remarkable amount of men, I guess Marines, that were lost in this rough, tough fight there. About five hundred Americans were lost there in that little skirmish. But the Japanese were kicked off this, right between two rivers. There was a river on one

side of us that was between what was left of the Japanese and the river on the other side of us, where they weren't. Supposedly. And that was our little home. But the interesting thing about this place was that the infantry decided that we were going to stay there for a little while, they might as well train for the infantry, from what they had been trained. Now, back in the States, you couldn't use a lot of live ammo over the infantry, heavy stuff, like artillery fire.

John: Okay.

Maurice: So they used us, the way they would do that, they would take company by company down across the river and start them up the coast, where the Japanese division went, the remnants of the rest of it that was lying there. And the artillery would lay down a barrage between the infantry who would start using their mortars. And we would set a barrage down so the infantry could retreat back to their boats, back across the river to safety. And they did this with company after company of the regiments that were accompanying us. And they became pretty familiar to our fire. They weren't afraid of it then. Because we got to be pretty good. I mean we were getting it twenty yards away from our infantry.

John: Yeah. Yeah. You say you did, or you didn't, get twenty yards away.?

Maurice: They put our artillery fire down there. About twenty yards away.

John: Oh, wow. That is close.

Maurice: That was pretty close. Well, we took care. And we had this Piper Cub observer, which was overhead and would watch what was going on. And so, information would come down from the fire direction center. That is where I was located. Among several fellows. And they would relay the information, what to do, and how to put the fire, the artillery fire. So we kept doing that for several months. And the Japanese got used to us. And we got used to them.

John: Okay.

Maurice: And MacArthur decided they needed us in the Philippines, on the Baguio campaign. You know, Baguio, on this island, which was the main island in the Philippines. That had been the summer capital in the Philippines where MacArthur and other officers would spend their summers, and where the cathedral, such as it was after it was pretty well, not damaged, but pretty well bumped up a little bit by artillery fire. And the Japanese, that was another division. I don't know if it was Yamashita, or who it was, was the commanding officer there, but all I know was that MacArthur hated him. He never gave MacArthur one of them. I didn't have a particularly high regard for MacArthur.

So, anyway, episode that happened along the way. And we were put, we went to Lingayen Gulf. That is where the Japanese had originally landed for their invasion of the Philippines. Manila. And we didn't have any infantry ahead of us, or around us. And ahead of us, they were trying to climb up this mountain and, so in order to keep us from being popped off by some of the Japanese fellows down there, and finding these dumb Yankees. They were shooting at us, which they did with their terrible artillery.

John: Theirs wasn't any good?

Maurice Well, they didn't have any heavy artillery. And it wasn't very good. It wasn't howitzers. They didn't know how to lob it. So when it would come over us, it would go over and it would pop up in the air. And on the other hand, we had the American anti-artillery going over the other way, to the mountain top, to where the Japanese were lodged. And I did get up there after a while, to the remains of it, and saw the city was just a wreck. Nothing but pieces. But they spared the cathedral, which was used as a hospital. When I got to see it, still was used. And what they did, we did it once to them, for our own protection, we took some of our units that had been used for some other purpose. Oh, I don't know what it was used for. Communications, outfit. We didn't need that kind now. And they made them a kind of a, well, what would you call them? Well, unit.

John: Okay.

Maurice: For us. And they would put around the front of us at night this barbed wire, and then all of this trip wires. It was kind of funny, in a way, because one night, my tent wasn't very far from where this protection group was and their stuff. And I heard this bang-bang-bang. And I thought, "What the hell is going on?" So some of us popped out to take a look, naturally. And what we saw was star shells bursting in the air.

John: Oh, okay.

Maurice: Above this wired group area, and in the wire was caught a caribou. Some farmer's outfit. And he was just mad as hell because he might be hit by these, he was walking into land mines. And they would go off, and the star shells would go off, and our outfit, our guys didn't do any shooting at them because they could see right away that he was there. They didn't want to kill him. And but, he didn't know how to get out of that thing. And he finally turned around, I guess, I don't know how badly he was wounded but he finally got out of there. With the star shells and everything. Every now and then something would come along, the fellows would tell me, and sometimes it was dogs. Sometimes it was a monkey. We would get this entrapment type of thing going so there was not much you

could do. You couldn't get out of there to relieve them.

John: Yeah. Yeah.

Maurice: So we finally got up, the infantry finally made it to the former capital, captured the area, and dislodged the Japanese remnant of a division, that just went instead off down to the south, down the valley, off somewhere. So it was free for us to get up there, which we did. And set up our government at Baguio facing the retreating Japanese. Interesting area because the ones that helped the American troops, infantry for supplies and water and stuff, up this mountain, were Baguio people, that is the aborigines. And they were like American Indians. They were the laborers. And they would have these large cone-shaped baskets that they could wear on their, they would have the upper part around their head and then around their shoulders, and down their back. And they would bring up supplies and so forth to the Americans. There wasn't any other way of getting up this terrain. Except through them. Very interesting people.

John: Let me interrupt this. What was your rank?

Maurice: I was a sergeant.

John: Okay.

Maurice: Yeah. Just a plain sergeant. Originally they had decided they needed officers for the fire direction center. Somewhere along the line they said that wasn't necessary. Just a common, ordinary, GI could learn how to do this. So I had a little smarts. They wanted people who had a college degree or a partial degree like me. So, well, we were all through now with the shooting. So we went into a kind of a rest area down below Baguio near Lagoya. And sitting there, and MacArthur decided he had to get after this Japanese division, what was left of it. Throw some lead at them. There was a lot of Japanese deserters around. So he decided he would get a couple of Army officers and form two infantry regiments out of these guys. But they would have to have artillery to protect them. So they detached out batteries, the three batteries, Able, Baker, and Charlie. Out of the, instead of sitting there on our backsides, relaxing, and sent us way north. I think it was called Intercoast Northbay or Intercoast Sewer - I can't remember what the designation was. And in between the coastal areas where the road went up was a mountain range, and there was a road over it. And they had to get over that range, in kind of a rain forest area. It rained all the time. So many days, so many hours during the day.

John: Yes.

Maurice: So they put these two Japanese divisions, or I mean Filipino divisions led by white officers, to push them up. To give them training to push the Japanese out of this area and down in front of them into the valley on the other side. An area called Cervantes. I remember that name. A little so-called town. Cervantes. But the only trouble, we got set up all right, and our artillery got up. Now, along the way were these patios, rice paddies. But they were all dried out. But they were nice level flat pieces of ground, not very big. It was different kind of rice they grew up in the mountains. The native people grew it. It was more of a grain. Rice is a grain, too, but this was different. We could set up our guns in the rice paddies and when they took these,= Filipino infantry divisions to attack the Japanese infantry, the Filipinos didn't like that. They were scared to death of these Japanese. The officers that commanded the divisions would say to them, the infantry, we would put down this barrage on this Japanese location and we would lift the barrage. "You are to go in then, as soon as it is lifted, and attack with bayonets or guns, rifles. And push the Japanese back." They didn't want to do that. They just refused. The story is that the officers told them, either you do it or we will just bring the artillery fire back on you.

John: Oh, geez.

Maurice: So they did.

John: I am going to flip this over, okay?

[End of Tape 1, Side A]

John: Okay, there we are.

Maurice: There was another group of aborigines called the Igorot people, and there was a white man in charge of them, too. And apparently he had been a refugee from the Japanese invasion and he hung out with them. They hated the Japanese. So they were the kind, you know, they had these long swords, the machetes. And they had a loin cloth. And they looked like American Indians. And they had a mean habit of cutting off the heads of their enemies. And we were told by this white American officer who was in charge of them that after they had done a certain amount of this beheading, they would put them in a circle and do a dance. That was what this white guy told us. And he was with them. And he was a forward observer. He would direct our fire. We also had a Piper Cub which would watch the locations, because the Japanese then went down the other side of those mountains into the valley, retreated there. And so we had to push them off. And we did. They were giving us, we got a new kind of shell. A radio acted [sic. means activated] shell. See, the problem with firing in the mountains, is that you go over the hill but you wouldn't come down and you'd go all the way. So you needed

something that would come down this way so that when they came down, the radio acted [activated] would see, or feeling effect of the ground on the other side, and start popping off then. Now, if that hill had a road on it, or Japanese on it, the shell would pop off along the way instead of going right past them and down the other side. The only trouble with this shell, which we experimented with, was you would shoot it up to go over the mountains and it would hit a cloud, and the cloud would activate the shell. And then it would pop off up there. So unless it was clear, if it was cloudy, you couldn't use it. But that was all right. So, we finally got through to the others. We got to this place called Cervantes, which was so-called, the name. And the, we were to be relieved there. We were. We went back to the Lingayen area, and the only trouble, this might be the first time this happened. They sent some out to relieve us, an artillery outfit who were, where they come from, heaven only knows. But they probably were told the Japanese would plant these sharp, you had to protect your artillery pieces so that you wouldn't be subject to fire from their materials, mortars, or whatever. So a couple of our 105s, we heard that when we left, we were told the Japanese hit it and destroyed it, and the people who were manning it. Well, so, we got out of there. But we had protected ourselves. It wasn't as bad as the, there is another story I'll tell you. You want to hear the other story?

John: Absolutely, sure. What a remarkable story. Wow.

Maurice: In New Guinea, we were put on these Landing Craft Infantry, we were put on LSTs. The big ones. Artillery pieces, and the trucks were with them. So we had everything to go with us to go to the Philippines, but we were replaced by an outfit that was pretty ignorant. And they thought, apparently, that the quiet night place there, with nobody shooting at us, it was just like a rest camp. Unfortunately, it wasn't. And they didn't use their infantry to train them like our outfit did. Went up the coast, some of the infantry did, and they got up a ways, and they were attacked by the Japanese. Now where we were was also a small encampment of Dutch.

John: Oh, Dutch troops?

Maurice: They weren't troops so much as they were what the Dutch had, a kind of constabulary for the native population.

John: Okay.

Maurice: And it was just a small group. When the commanding officer of this Japanese division saw that our outfit was gone and Nip outfit was pretty much aware what they was doing, they snuck into the area that we had evacuated. They killed the Dutch constabulary and sank whatever was left of the replacement outfit. The

reason I know they did this is because one of the guys in law school, I had mentioned this to him. He was quite a character. He had three ships shot out from underneath him, landing craft. And he was a kind of a wisenheimer. And he said to me, "Oh, I know what happened there. I was in charge of Landing Craft Troops, several of them, with the Aussie outfits, which were on an island there off the New Guinea coast. And we got this radio alert somehow from the Americans who had gotten up the coast. And were attacked by the Japanese. And they didn't know how to protect themselves. And they were really being mangled." So the Aussies loaded up these boats, landing craft, it's a kind of a long craft, with stairs up the sides for infantry to go up. And they came to the rescue of the Americans. And so he told us what had happened. A very interesting story about Borneo. You know, most people don't know what happened at Borneo. They have heard of Borneo. And some of the wild beasts of Borneo. But Borneo had a harbor and MacArthur wanted the harbor to eliminate the Japanese force there. Now the harbor was, it was a kind of a raised area around the harbor and on that raised area was artillery and behind it was a landing field. So MacArthur got the idea, and it was a pretty good idea. He was good at conceiving these things. And at the Philippines, they would get the planes, they was bombardier planes. Dive bombers. And a group of them would come out and go down to hit this base, and do a dog-leg over to an airport which we had located at the tip end of New Guinea.

John: Okay.

Maurice: What the heck was the name of that? Well, anyway, which was very fine. Well, the Aussies had a cruiser. It was their only cruiser, and they were very proud of it. And so they sent this cruiser, its only piece of heavy, not artillery...

John: Heavy guns on the cruiser?

Maurice: Oh, yeah, a heavy cruiser. So they sent that down there. Alongside of it, of course, they had these landing craft with my friend who was in charge of a group of these, and bringing in Aussie troops. And they were going to land there and secure the harbor. Which was a very good plan except it wasn't timed quite right, and the airplanes didn't land. And into the harbor comes sailing this Aussie cruiser. I don't think there were bands playing, but anyway, maybe there was a flag on that Aussie ship. And all alongside were these landing craft. Japanese, they waited. According to this guy in law school, he couldn't figure it out. The Japanese had been listening to the radio broadcast by the Japanese people, the war department, that they had done so many wonderful things like destroying the American fleet and capturing so many. And, of course, these Japanese back in Borneo had no way of knowing. They were a long way from any action that was going on. Up towards the Philippines. So they waited. And into them sails this cruiser. So when they finally woke up that it was not a Japanese cruiser that the Japanese had taken over

and Japanese crew. So they started shooting at them. And they were shooting at the landing craft. Then comes the Americans with their planes, so they had to go and they had to bust up the Japanese planes. But the Japanese planes were dropping bombs on my friend and his landing craft, and he was blown up, too.

John: Oh, wow.

Maurice: Of course, he ended up with a bunch of silver plates in him. And when the Americans decided they just couldn't go off, they had to fight, so their planes, they would intercept the Japanese planes, and drop bombs on the Japanese artillery that was there protecting the harbor. So it was quite a mess.

John: I can imagine, yeah.

Maurice: And so he said the Aussies were pretty mad at MacArthur because it was their pet ship. The only one they had. So it was destroyed.

John: Oh, that is terrible. I didn't know that.

Maurice: That is what he said. Oh, he was a character. The only thing about him, do you want to hear about him?

John: Oh, sure. Absolutely.

Maurice: Well, you know, the Americans would take merchant ships, and they would put these guns up at the front. I don't know what caliber they were. Six inches, or something.

John: Could be.

Maurice: Well, he was put on one of these Australian merchant ships that were loaded with supplies for the American troops on one of the islands. I don't know if it was Guadalcanal, but it was up the coast. It was one of the French islands. I don't know which one. There is a whole bunch of them. And the ship sailed and when it got there, stopped at their harbor. But they didn't unload. And so my friend says, "What is the matter? Are you going to discharge the supplies?" The guys are sitting there, waiting for supplies. Maybe it was ammo. I don't know. I don't know what it was. And the captain said, well, they couldn't. It seems there was a union contract, or something. And it was an off day. And the crew refused to work on the off day. Well, my friend, I'll tell you what kind of a feisty character, he took his crew, which was maybe six men or so, and he had them go down and dress up in full uniform. And he had his revolver along. And he told the captain he was taking command of the ship. Call your crew together. He calls the crew - this

is what this guy told me - and he told the crew, "You discharge the supplies on the shore that these men need. Or else." And so they did. Well, after that, he took his men in the boat and went ashore. Well, he couldn't stay on that ship because it wouldn't be healthy. He then reported to the commanding officer, whoever it was. The problem was, he completely agreed with him. They needed the supplies. So, he was then sent to Finschhafen. I told you he was a feisty guy. He would get into a fight, he got into a fight with an officer to whom he was reporting and, I guess they got a little drinking, and he made some slanderous remark about the Jews or something. He was a Jewish young boy. And so he slugs his commanding officer.

John: Oh, wow.

Maurice: So he then goes and reports to the commanding officer at Finschhafen, whatever port, whatever it was. And asks if he can get into another appointment. The fellow says yeah. See, in a combat area, and I know of other cases like that, you don't get rid of these people. You deal with them. So they put him in charge of these landing craft. So that is how he got into this landing craft thing.

John: Oh, okay.

Maurice: And how long before, I don't know when he lost his other two ships, landing craft, but the last one at Borneo was his last one, and he ended up in the hospital, for what he had to get these silver plates, and a cane. So he was going around law school taking the courses and stumbling along with his cane. Quite a guy. I kind of admired him. That was his story. But the poor damned fools who thought they were in a quiet routine rest area and didn't watch out what was going on. They were told, I am sure, this is a dangerous spot. Don't do anything foolish. Which they did.

John: Yeah. Yeah.

Maurice: And the artillery outfit that replaced us in this valley in the Philippines so we could get out of there and go back down along the coast, that one battery was attacked and destroyed. After they had been told that it was not a pleasant place. So that was that. So when we got down there, of course, we ended up. And the bomb was dropped.

John: Now, had you had any indication that you might be making the assault on the Home Islands?

Maurice: Yes, we were definitely told we were going to be part of it. See, MacArthur had his idea he was going to have one Marine division and a couple of infantry divisions, and they were going to make - his idea - from the south of the main

islands. We would have attacked it. And, of course, the Japanese would see that we were the main attack, and then MacArthur would come in from the north, near Tokyo, or somewhere around in there. I don't know where. And come that way. And the coast would be clear. Of course, we would be the suckers.

John: Yeah.

Maurice: And that's a kind of mean area. Osaka, or I forget which one of the ports, I think. And we had these large LSTs that would pull up to the beach and open the top and the front comes open, and out comes the trucks with our guns and stuff. So off we went, and startled the Japanese residents because they didn't have any heavy trucks or anything like that. Such trucks as they did were small affairs that were using charcoal.

John: I heard that. Yeah.

Maurice: And in the back of the truck cab was this device with a smoke stack and they didn't get much mileage out of it. Very slow. But it would go right along on the road. So as we would go along at night, we were going to Hamiji, it was a castle in Hamiji that was a naval academy of some kind that we were to take over. And as the trucks would go along, we would see, we would sweep around going around the bend our lights, see, we had headlights. And they, of course, would not have any lights on their cars because of the attacks by the planes. Our great big headlights would sweep, we could see these faces looking at us around the corner of the town, the small towns that we would go through. And we went a ways and all of a sudden we came to this area. There was nothing but sidewalks and roads, and everything else was nothing. It had been burned down.

John: Oh, okay.

Maurice: We pulled over to the side there, for some reason. I don't know what it was. So we sat there, our whole convoy, a whole long list of trucks and guns and Jeeps, waiting for somebody to tell us where to go. And we sat there, and we could see something kind of strange coming down the sidewalk in the distance. And we were peering over the trucks to look. Well, there was two little lights and they would go bobbing along towards us. And there wasn't no lights around, of course. This is all this whole area has been burned out. So up comes along, what is it, they were two Japanese gendarmes. I call them gendarmes. And they have their funny little uniforms on with their caps. And I think they had swords. I wasn't quite sure. But MacArthur kept the gendarme system. And they were getting along, and they were seeing their way with these Japanese lanterns. Each one was holding a Japanese lantern.

John: Wow.

Maurice: With a candle. So that was the only light that they had. No electricity, of course. So these two funny looking lights came along and everybody was just looking, what the hell is this business? Watching them come. And they didn't say anything, and we didn't say anything. And they would go by, these two gendarmes. So that was our first introduction to the Japanese army, or police department. We got to this naval academy that had been abandoned, and we took it over. Stayed there for a few months, and the only thing exciting that happened there, our outfit was formerly a National Guard outfit. And it had been activated during the maneuvers in Louisiana, a long time before. So people, the old-timers there knew everybody else. We had one guy in that outfit, and they had to assign people to do different things. And this fellow was assigned to guard a rice depot. Rice. And so apparently, he did. And he had a Jeep. And one night he was running along on the road in his Jeep, and he was stopped by a Jeep of MPs.

John: Okay.

Maurice: And they stopped him. And he identified himself because he was dressed, and he had in company a person accompanying him who was a little Japanese girl in American uniform. And in the back seat was a big sack of rice from the depot that he was guarding.

John: Okay.

Maurice: Well, this is a no-no, obviously. Well, the way they handled this thing, instead of putting him there in prison, he was turned over to the commanding officer in our unit. A captain. So he was kept there, and he was being guarded, so called, by, of course, he knew them personally. And there was another guy, this other fellow, probably knew him personally. And he had a pistol which-- he was his guard. So for several days, or a month, while we were there, he would go around and eat with us by the guard. So what were they going to do with him? So they decided before we were getting ready to go, he was told that they were looking for some people to reenlist for one year, two years, whatever it was. It was a year. Well, nobody wanted the job.

John: I can imagine.

Maurice: There was the boat sitting there for leave, for us to go back home. Wouldn't you reenlist? Like a damned fool. But they made this offer to the prisoner they would forget about his little misdeed, taking the rice and having the little girl, little Japanese girl. AJA, or whatever they called them. If he reenlisted, they would drop all these charges against him and he would reenlist. So he said he would

reenlist. They dropped the charges. I think he was the guy that forgot.

[End of Tape 1, Side B]

John: Okay, I think we are on now.

Maurice: Are we on track?

John: Okay, so he forgot his Atabrine?

Maurice: So they knew right away what had happened, so they made him right away take his Atabrine. So then they didn't send him back anywhere. They didn't send him to a hospital. Oh, no. You took your Atabrine and went back in service. So that reminds me of another character. We had, when we got on this ship to go back to the States, we had a bunch of, it was full of all kinds of GIs, and one of the men, I started talking to him. And they were infantrymen who had been in the Baguio campaign, and they had things to tell us. One of the stories, this guy said, he slept above me or below me, I'm not sure which bunk he had. He was a, oh, yeah, I forget what disease he had. He had some kind of a fever. And he said he got out of his hole in the morning, he stood up and he fell over. With fever. And then he was telling me about one of the men in his outfit who got so fed up with the campaign. He had been fighting down in New Guinea and now he was in this trek up the mountains in Baguio. And he got tired of it. He decided, this is for the birds. And so he took a Jeep on his own, and got the gas, and went to Manila, down the island. And didn't tell anybody, of course. And when he was there, he went the rounds to the taverns, whatever there was down there at that time.

John: Yeah. Yeah.

Maurice: The GI hangouts. And got a taste of the good life, and then he came back up to Baguio, and pulled in to where the Jeeps were. And got out, and reported to his commanding officer, the captain. Or major, I don't know which it was. And told him what he had done. The CO, who knew him, just sent him back into the line, right up in the front. That was his penalty. Forget about the rest of it. You go down to Manila and all the rest of that stuff, you go in the front lines. And he stayed in there for a while, I guess. Until they got to Baguio. Well, that was him. That is about it.

John: When you got back to the States, Morry, how long had you been overseas?

Maurice: Well, we were nine months in New Guinea, nine months in Hawaii, and nine months in the Philippines.

John: Okay. Twenty-seven.

Maurice: And then there were a couple of months there in Japan.

John: Okay. When you got back to the States, did you get out right away?

Maurice: Yes. We went right to a center where we could. They asked you where you wanted to go. And I took, what was the name of the fort? By Rockford, Illinois.

John: Fort Sheridan?

Maurice: No.

John: I don't know.

Maurice: And the reason I wanted to be discharged there because I could get transportation home to Madison, Wisconsin, by my relatives who were in Rockford.

John: Oh, okay. Sure.

Maurice: So several of us got out there. Most of the residents of Rockford. And they gave us discharge papers and thanked us, and gave us our pay, which was due, and insurance papers, and other things like that. So, and they gave us letters for uniforms if we wanted to wear them.

John: What was it like, the first couple of weeks after you were out?

Maurice: It was nothing. Oh, I wasn't well. And I refused to go to an Army hospital. I suppose I should have. My stomach was all riled up and I went to a doctor in Madison, right in the office tower, the office building there. At Park, not Park, but University Avenue there. He gave me something for my stomach. I never did really recover till I discovered that I had, the doctors told me, the local doctors, at Associated Physicians down there on Regent Street. They could tell from the x-rays that I had an ulcer. Well, for about two years I was nursing that. It drove my dear wife nuts, trying to feed me, because I would only eat a little bit, and I couldn't take any more. But she didn't know what to feed me, and she didn't know what to eat herself. But she is a good cook. In the day time when I was working, I was working all through this back in the law school, in the library, and I would go to Rennebaums and they had a restaurant there. And I would have poached egg on toast.

John: Okay.

Maurice: That was my noon feed. My noon meal. And if they had banana cream pie, I really was in glory. So that was my-- banana cream pie and two poached eggs on toast. Until we even, Dorothy and I, went down to the South. I had a month's vacation, so we, whenever we stopped to eat, she would find out if they had eggs. And she would order maybe pancakes. Anything mild. And then when we get to New Orleans, what are we going to eat?

John: Oh, no.

Maurice: One night, we were a little off of Bourbon Street, because we had residence at one of the hotels there. And she asked the waiter there in this rather kind of an eating establishment they had in this hotel, what he could do to feed me. Well, they had a kind of a, they got me out some kind, I don't know what. Something mild. In the meantime, my wife was having some local food and it was full of spice. And I would come up from her dish, and my lips would swell up. And so we got through that. And along the way we would stop and I would get a bottle of half and half, which was half milk and half cream. And I would drink that every four hours or so, a good big swallow of that. The doctors didn't know what to do about me. So when we finally got back and after about four months, four years. A good doctor happily announced to me they finally found out something that could take care of those ulcers. It was some Methedrine. Some Methedrine. And I said, "When do I get it?" "Now." So I took some Methedrine and it did quiet down the ulcers, and from then on I could eat.

John: Okay. Great. That's great. And then, had you graduated from college before you went in?

Maurice: No.

John: So you did that afterwards.

Maurice: I finished. I got two degrees. I got an undergraduate degree and then I got a law degree.

John: Okay. You had the GI Bill. Did you use it?

Maurice: Yes. But I didn't for the first two years. I worked my way at Milwaukee where I could get two years of college while I was working full time.

John: Afterwards, what about vets organizations? VFW? Or the Legion?

Maurice: No, I never belonged to anything. I never was good with organizations. And I wouldn't have anything to do with them, these guys going around with these caps

and demonstrating...

John: How about reunions? Did you ever get together with any of the guys?

Maurice: No. The outfit I was attached to, the 33rd Division, as friends of mine who were in Hawaii used to call it, the "Dirty-Dird." An interesting guy because he ended up as a salesman for a loose-leaf service who would solicit us in the law school and I was the one who would order them. And he and I got to know one another real well. And he had grown up on Kauai. His father was the engineer at the sugar factory there, and I told him I liked Hui. That is the little town, it was the county seat. And in it there was this little bitty library, and a dime store. And I said down the street was this tree that was all full of gorgeous blossoms. The whole tree was just full of them and I told him about it, and he said, "Oh, that was right in front of where we lived." So he had grown up and he was a graduate of that high school there. And I said to him, "Did you people have a dialect that you spoke among yourselves?" And he said, "Yes, we did. Patois dialect. It was a combination of several languages because, you see, the planters, the plantation owners employed various people from everywhere to work their fields. They started with the Japanese. The Japanese just wouldn't do it very long. They would quit and they would open businesses, like a restaurant. And then they ended up with the Portuguese. The Filipinos. And I think the Filipinos were the last ones while we were there. And it is interesting to see how the GIs, we were there for nine months on Kauai, some of these of our outfit would go out, they would go out with quote "a Portuguese." Actually it was what we would call AJA, Americans of Japanese Abstraction. Whatever it was. Ancestry. Americans of Japanese Ancestry. And there weren't any other women for these guys to go out with. It was a nice island.

John: This is a remarkable story. Something I ask everybody that was in World War II. You were a young man, your life was ahead of you, and then suddenly this happened, and three, four years of your life just got taken away. What do you feel about that?

Maurice Oh, that is the way it went. As my grandma would say, that is the way cookie crumbs.

John: I have never heard a World War II vet gripe about it. They griped about conditions and all that, but to say it shouldn't have happened to me, or, no, they all say, I had to do it.

Maurice: Everybody did it.

John: Yeah. That is remarkable.

Maurice: When we got back, after a while, I was at law school and, of course, the Vietnam business developed, and the school was right in the middle of it. And the first thing that we really became conscious of it were these guys cavorting around and being chased by the deputy sheriffs, and everybody else, police. And tear gas was being thrown. Well, and it would drift into the law library. We were right there in the middle of the darned thing. And I said to the kids, my girls, you better go home early. I took it upon myself. I didn't need anybody's advice, so I told the boss, the Dean of the Law School, what I was doing. Okay. The next day, more tear gas. And so I went to see the dean again. He said, "Well, they can get a"—what do you call it? The thing you blow your nose with... Kleenex!-- "Give them the Kleenex award." Big-hearted guy. So he had no sympathy for them. They didn't get to go home early. Course I would've winked sometimes if they had to go home early. I was a little bit autocratic, myself. They talk about having sick leave, and all that, you know, but somebody is going to take your job. Somebody is going to do it, if you have to go to have a dental appointment, go have your dental appointment. Somebody's going to sit in for you. Sure, Joe or Mary or somebody will do it. So that is the way we did it. We worked it out, instead of all this other rules and regulations. We didn't play too much by the rules and regulations, I'm afraid. Maybe it wasn't exactly kosher, but we got by.

John: Yeah, sure.

Maurice: And my loyal crew stayed on, and they are still there.

John: When did you retire?

Maurice: Eighty-two. I was seventy-two years old, or seventy-one years old. Yeah, I was born in 1911. That is when I retired. And apparently the crowd still likes me down there. They've invited me back to the law school for coffee and coffee cake and so forth. And what I was doing was, when I retired, I found you could go to classes on campus for free. So I went to art school, and the courses I wanted, they were graphic arts. That and some etching. So I had a lot of fun with graphic arts, making these prints. And I made a whole bunch of different ones. And the ones of the local situation, the local campus, why, the law school crowd, they wanted copies. So I gave them to them. And they put them up, the friends of mine put them up in one of the reading rooms, study halls, or whatever it was, there. And so the wall has got a whole lot of them.

John: The art school had quite a colony of print makers there. Taylor, and Meeker, and Collescott. I know all of them.

Maurice: Collescott. Oh, yeah, I know Collescott. I had classes from them.

John: Okay. What a remarkable story. This is so great. You've got a great memory.

[End of Interview]