

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
RALPH SCHMIDT  
Paratrooper and Infantryman, Marine Corps, World War II.

2003

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**Schmidt, Ralph G.**, (1922- ). Oral History Interview, 2003.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 110 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 110 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

**Abstract:**

Ralph G. Schmidt, a Belgium, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War II service with the 28<sup>th</sup> Marines in the Pacific theater, including his role in the invasion of Iwo Jima. Schmidt talks about his service deferment because he worked on a farm, enlisting in the Marines as soon as his brother was old enough to help on the family farm, and Marine training and mechanic school in California. After paratrooper training at Camp San Luis (New Caledonia), he was assigned to the 1st Marine Parachute Regiment, and he comments on the impracticality of parachute training in a jungle, injuries Marines sustained on practice jumps, and the dissolution of the parachute unit. Shipped to the Solomon Islands, Schmidt touches upon being based at Guadalcanal, mopping up on Vella Lavella, and securing an airfield on Bougainville. While shipping back to the States for a furlough, he recalls being on an Army transport ship that dumped a lot of beef overboard. Schmidt reflects on availability of food in the Pacific and getting sick of mutton. He addresses meeting his girlfriend through letter correspondence, getting a second furlough because there were no records of his already having one, having side effects from a yellow fever vaccine, and not catching malaria even though he skipped taking his Atabrine pills. He was reassigned to the heavy weapons company of the 28th Regiment, 5th Marine Division. Schmidt talks about training for the Iwo Jima landing and traveling from island to island picking up Marines aboard the USS Bellatrix. He provides a detailed account of the Iwo Jima landing including shore bombardment, landing near Mount Suribachi with a half-track, conditions on the beach, having poor intelligence about the underground Japanese fortifications, taking photographs during combat, and instructions to hold fire so the Japanese would not know their positions. Schmidt speaks about navigating and clearing caves, taking few prisoners, and having mismatched dog tags. He describes seeing the flag raising on Mt. Suribachi. He addresses carrying a wounded buddy to a Higgins boat and helping to take a Japanese airstrip. Schmidt touches upon training for the invasion of Japan at Camp Tarawa (Hawaii), occupation duty in Japan, and volunteering for the inactive Reserves. He details being called to duty for the Korean War, but being excused after his wife gave birth to twins. On Iwo Jima, he comments on cleaning up equipment, burying dead Japanese, and making a cemetery for Marines after the battle. Schmidt reflects on the phrase, "There's no atheist in a foxhole." He touches on the use of Dobermans on Iwo Jima, having some close calls during combat, and a having a rough ship ride back to the States. Schmidt characterizes some of the men from his unit and states flamethrower bearers were specially targeted by the Japanese. Throughout the interview he explains his photographs and souvenirs.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Schmidt (b.1922) served in the Marine Corps from 1942 to 1945. Born in Port Washington (Wisconsin) and raised in Belgium (Wisconsin), he served in the Pacific theater and was awarded a bronze star for helping to evacuate wounded Marines on Iwo Jima. After the war, he worked for the Continental Can Company and settled in Milwaukee.

Interviewed by Allen Buchholz, 2003

Transcribed by Jim Erwin, 2008

Checked and corrected by Joan Bruggink, 2011

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011

**Interview Transcript:**

- Allen: This interview is with Ralph Schmidt, a lifelong resident of Delton, Wisconsin, and his address is 262 S. Lar-Ann Street in Belgium. He was in the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Regiment in the Marines, World War II, and then in the Heavy Weapons Company, 28<sup>th</sup> Marines, 5<sup>th</sup> Division on Iwo Jima. Before we talk about the Marines and where you were, let's talk briefly about what you did before the war: where you were born, what your family did.
- Schmidt: I worked for my dad on the farm. And then when Pearl Harbor was, that very night, we were in Lake Church and then the next day I told my dad, "Well, I'm gonna enlist in the service. I'll stay home one year until Myron is old enough that he gets his driver's license and then he can help you on the farm."
- Allen: Myron was your brother?
- Schmidt: Right. And then one year to the day, December 7, 1942, I enlisted in the Marine Corps. Well, I had enlisted before that but I couldn't go 'til then, and I took one deferment, and I had a heck of a job getting out of that deferment because we did so much work for other farmers, they didn't want to leave me go. Alvin Angheim[?] was on the Draft Board and he talked to the other guys, and my dad was along too, and he said, "This guy wants to go." He said, "We might as well leave him go." So then I went.
- Allen: Why did you pick the Marines?
- Schmidt: Best outfit. [both laugh]
- Allen: At that point you probably didn't have any idea where you would go.
- Schmidt: No, no, no, none. The only thing I knew I'd go to San Diego for training, that I knew. Yeah.
- Allen: Was it—
- Schmidt: Marine Corps base.
- Allen: Was it Pendleton at the time or was it called something else?
- Schmidt: No. The boot camp itself was right at San Diego, the Marine Corp base, and then we went to Camp Elliot; that's before the Navy took it over. That's where the rifle range and everything was. And then when I came back from overseas and we formed the 5<sup>th</sup> Division, then we went to Camp Pendleton. That was the training base then.

- Allen: So you did all your training in California, between Pendleton, Elliot, San Diego?
- Schmidt: Yup.
- Allen: And that was the only US post that you had? You never went to another—
- Schmidt: Not in the United States, no.
- Allen: So after you finished with basic—how long was basic, typical six to eight weeks?
- Schmidt: Nine weeks. I'm just trying to think now. I can look in here and I can see just about how long it took before I went overseas the first time. [pause] June 26<sup>th</sup>, so that was January, February, March, April, May, June: six months.
- Allen: So once Basic and AIT, that sort of stuff, was over, then where did you go?
- Schmidt: Then I went to the mechanic's school.
- Allen: And that was where?
- Schmidt: That was at Pendleton—no, Elliot, Elliot. That was at Elliott.
- Allen: So what part of California was Elliot in?
- Schmidt: That was about forty miles outside of San Diego, toward the north, yeah.
- Allen: So you went to school to be a weapons mechanic?
- Schmidt: Well, not necessarily weapons. For the motors.
- Allen: Okay. It was general.
- Schmidt: Yeah.
- Allen: And then what happened after that?
- Schmidt: Well, then we shipped out from there, we went to New Caledonia; that's a French protectorate. It was really somethin' to go there. Their mode of transportation was ox carts. That was really somethin'; that was a backward world. [laughs] There we trained—that's where I joined the Paratroops. Then we trained to go to Guadalcanal for occupation and what not.
- Allen: You trained to be a paratrooper; did you actually land up—

- Schmidt: We would never—if we would've went in, actually we would have had to go, but we didn't get the full training what the other guys had. In the Marine Corps, I don't care if you are a cook or a baker or whatnot, everybody goes on the line. There's no—you don't need no cooks and bakers when you go into action.
- Allen: Did thy ever use paratroopers?
- Schmidt: No, they never—
- Allen: I didn't think so. That would have been suicide.
- Schmidt: Oh, well, it was all jungle.
- Allen: It's suicide going in on the beach, but going in by parachute would be ridiculous.
- Schmidt: No, there was no place to—every time—in Caledonia they practiced landing and jumping, you know. Every goddamned time we'd have the hospital full of guys that broke their legs. No, that was not a good thing.
- Allen: So you jumped in practice, but you never—
- Schmidt: Yeah, yeah.
- Allen: There was never any in battle?
- Schmidt: No.
- Allen: So that was the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Regiment, but then after that it got dissolved, you said?
- Schmidt: That's right. All the different—the Raiders, the Paratroopers, Rangers—all them always got dissolved because they didn't belong to no outfit, so they brought them over here and that was the nucleus for the 5<sup>th</sup> Division. Them guys had all seen action; you know, we had all been in, and the new guys, well we took care of them. [laughs]
- Allen: So while you were in New Caledonia, did you come back to the States after that?
- Schmidt: No, No. That was the jumpin' off place for the Solomon Islands.
- Allen: Okay. Tell me about that.

- Schmidt: Well, we went in New Caledonia, that was Camp San Luis. From there we loaded on the *USS American Legion* and we went to Guadalcanal. And we were in Guadalcanal—let's see how many days. [pause] We got in Guadalcanal September 29<sup>th</sup>, 1943.
- Allen: September 29<sup>th</sup>? And when you say you got there, was that an invasion landing?
- Schmidt: No. That was also the jumping off point from there to the rest of the Solomon Islands. From there we went, I went on the—two hundred of us went on the *USS Ward*; that was a four-stacker destroyer. That destroyer, remember, if you watched the movie, the *USS Ward* sunk that submarine at Pearl Harbor. Well, I traveled on that to New Caledonia. That was an old four stacker, but they could really go.
- Allen: So what did you do on Guadalcanal?
- Schmidt: There we got on different ships and what not to go to Vella Lavella. Let's see, when did we get there? October 8<sup>th</sup> we got to Vella Lavella.
- Allen: And what happened at Vella Lavella?
- Schmidt: There was some Japs there yet, and our outfit was there really to guard the island. We had an airbase on one end of the island and a PT boat base on the other end of the island. Oh, that was heavily wooded. That was the jungles. The gol-darned roots from the trees, they'd go up to thirty, forty feet, just the roots from every direction, then the tree first started, so you'd get up underneath that; you had a lotta place to hide.
- Allen: So basically we had taken over the island but there were still some Japanese there hiding out, sleeping and that kind of stuff?
- Schmidt: Yeah, right. And there our outfit trained to made the landing on Bougainville. We did make a landing on Bougainville when I belonged to the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Regiment. And we made the landing there and secured the airfield and everything, then the Army came and took over. Then we went back to Guadalcanal, and then back to the States.
- Allen: So at Bougainville, was that a type of invasion as well?
- Schmidt: Oh yeah! Oh, yeah. Ohhh, yeah!
- Allen: So you saw fighting there?
- Schmidt: Right. Yeah, yeah.

- Allen: Tell me a little about that. Did you go in on LSTs and that sort of thing?
- Schmidt: Yeah, right. Yup. We had—when I was with the parachute regiment, there we had no half tracks or anything like that, that was just mortars and machine guns and what have you.
- Allen: So when you went into Bougainville—
- Schmidt: We knew when we went there that all we were gonna do was secure the beachhead. Then the Army—they only took part of that island, just enough to take the airfield and what not, and then we set up a perimeter there and then Army took over, and they never did take the rest of the island.
- Allen: No?
- Schmidt: Yeah. They just held right on—
- Allen: They just needed the airfield?
- Schmidt: Right, yeah.
- Allen: I read a little bit about Bougainville, but it wasn't—sure, it was intense if you were there, but it wasn't anything like Iwo Jima where the Japanese were dug in. No jungle fighting and that sort of thing?
- Schmidt: No, no. Well, I tell ya, we did take enough of the island to get jungle fighting. When you make an invasion like that, the bombers come, the Navy comes and they knock out just about every tree that's there. [laughs]
- Allen: That worked there; it didn't work very well on Iwo because they were all on the ground.
- Schmidt: Well, there was no trees, yeah. [laughs] There you can see, and they were all leveled from where we were. [laughs]
- Allen: So after Bougainville, then you went back to the States?
- Schmidt: Yup. We went back to Guadalcanal; from there we loaded to go back to the States. We got on a—what the hell was the name of that ship? [laughs] It was an Army transport. There were no Navy guys on it; the Army ran this ship here, and they were loaded with beef. They had big freezers on there, they were loaded with beef and had very little other stuff, but we ate steak and steak and steak. Then when we got back, about two days out of San Diego, they opened up the doors and dumped all them goddamned [unintelligible] quarters into the ocean.

Allen: Why?

Schmidt: I suppose they wanted to get new stuff to take back. I'll bet you—

Allen: Maybe they didn't want to say we got some left and it wasn't fresh or whatever.

Schmidt: Yeah. Oh, two days we dumped over the side.

Allen: It seems like the military in World War II was the "haves" and the "have nots." You listen to guys who were fighting without the right foods and without the right clothes and—

Schmidt: Well, like when we was over in the Solomons there, that was two meals, that's all. And no red meat whatsoever; there was no fresh meat. We used to get some canned pork and mutton. I could not eat mutton. I could not eat mutton. I ate many coconuts. [both laugh] Yeah, I ate plenty of coconuts.

Allen: Did you eat mutton before you went in the Marines?

Schmidt: Not really, no. But you know, after I come out, I said, "I'm not eatin' no goddamned more sheep meat." But you know, my father-in-law there, they raised sheep, but they would make lamb chops and stuff, and goddamn, you know what? They're good! [both laugh] But to have mutton with that fat on, you know— Oh, shit.

Allen: Yeah, it was probably more of a preservative when you were in.

Schmidt: Oh man, yeah.

Allen: So after you got back to the States, what happened then?

Schmidt: Then we went—we all got thirty days furlough.

Allen: And that's when you met Joan, right?

Schmidt: No. I actually met her through the mail.

Allen: Yeah. But when you met her for the first time.

Schmidt: Oh yeah, right, right.

Allen: Tell me a little bit about that, how you met her in the mail.

- Schmidt: One of Joan's girlfriends was writing to Nick, and then she said, "Why don't you write to Ralph," and then she started writin' to me, and that's how it started. [both laugh] Through a girlfriend.
- Allen: So then when you came home, she was living in Chicago at the time?
- Schmidt: Yeah, yeah. At that time they lived in Chicago.
- Allen: And then did you go there to meet her?
- Schmidt: Yeah. When I came back to camp again a couple weeks later, or not a couple weeks, but a month, month and a half, the top sergeant said to me, he said, "Goddammit Ralph, didn't you get no furlough when you came back?" Oh, the old brain went into motion, you know, and I said, "Why?" Well he said, "There is none on your records." "Well," I said, "Goddammit, Smitty," that was his name, Smitty, Sergeant Smitty, I said, "How about fixing me up?" He said, "I'll fix you up with fifteen days plus seventy-two hours start and seventy-two hours coming back." So I got to go home again.
- Allen: After the thirty days he sent you right back?
- Schmidt: And then, to top it off, when the War was over, if you had any vacation coming or this or that, you got that in pay, so I put in for that son of a gun because there was no record there and I got thirty days pay. [both laugh]
- Allen: The good old military.
- Schmidt: Yeah. And that one time, too, I had that yellow fever shot, and that son of a gun, my arm pert near dropped off, it was so bad. And goddammit, all of a sudden I got notice again to go and get a yellow fever shot. I said, "Jesus Christ, I had that son of a bitch," and I told the corpsman, I said, "If I get as sick as I did last time, I'll shoot ya for sure." But that time it didn't bother me a bit. But that first time—
- Allen: But you didn't need it the second time; they just screwed up the records or—
- Schmidt: Yeah, they screwed up the records. There was no record there. Goddammit; oh, my arm—I had to lift one arm with the other. That was sore.
- Allen: Did you ever get any diseases, malaria, or any of that stuff?
- Schmidt: No, and that was so funny, because that Atabrine, that was the yellow pill, they tasted like sulfur; they taste like shit. I threw most of 'em away, but I never did get it. [both laugh]

- Allen: A lot of guys got it.
- Schmidt: Oh, golly, yeah.
- Allen: Probably more guys were brought down by diseases and things than war.
- Schmidt: Yeah, the Solomons—well, that whole works there, that was just full of that malaria. Yeah.
- Allen: So you came back to the United States, you had had forty-five days of furlough; then what happened?
- Schmidt: Then I went back and then went into the Heavy Weapons Company, 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Division, the 28<sup>th</sup> Marines, 5<sup>th</sup> Division. Then we trained in the States—well, not really too long, just enough to get the whole division together, and then we shipped out to Camp Tarawa in Hawaii. Let's see, when was that? [pause] On the 29<sup>th</sup> of September, 1944, we got to Hawaii.
- Allen: And how long did you stay at Tarawa?
- Schmidt: We left Hilo January 6<sup>th</sup> and Camp Tarawa there; that was for Iwo Jima.
- Allen: If you left there on the 6<sup>th</sup>, the invasion of Iwo was what, the 19<sup>th</sup> of February?
- Schmidt: Nineteenth, that's right. So we was aboard ship pert near forty-five days before we—
- Allen: Wow.
- Schmidt: Yeah. Oh, was I ever getting sick and tired, you know, bein' aboard ship.
- Allen: So you were just [unintelligible]
- Schmidt: Right. We'd go from one—Saipan, Tinian, and then New Hebrides, just pickin' up until we had the whole convoy together.
- Allen: And that took that whole time?
- Schmidt: Oh yeah. They were just—oh, you can't imagine how many ships there were in there. Ohhh!
- Allen: What ship were you on?
- Schmidt: Let's see; what ship was I on there? [pause] The *Belatrix*. That was a transport.

Allen: How do you spell that?

Schmidt: B-e-l-a-t-r-i-x.

Allen: What kind of a boat was that?

Schmidt: That was a regular troop transport.

Allen: All right. So you gathered the division together for forty-five days, and now you're ready to go on to Iwo Jima. I understand the Navy pounded it pretty good.

Schmidt: Oh, and the Air Force.

Allen: What was that like?

Schmidt: Ohhhh. You'd think there couldn't be a soul left, but the minute they stopped the bombardment, them buggers were there like they were before.

Allen: Where were you sitting during those bombardments? Were you miles away, or were you within sight of the island? Could you see the—

Schmidt: Well, as far as that goes, they were still bombarding—the *USS Mississippi* stood right off of Suribachi and we were the very first on the front—our halftrack was—there was nobody in front of us. We were right about three hundred yards off of Suribachi; there was nobody in front of us. And they were firing those goddamned sixteen inch shells—

Allen: Even while you were goin' in?

Schmidt: Ohhhh. For two days. Rip your ears out.

Allen: When you were waiting to go on and they were bombarding the island, how far off of the island were you?

Schmidt: Oh, they kept right on bombarding even as we were comin' in. I was in the eighth wave.

Allen: Yeah. But when they started the bombardment, were you way out at sea yet?

Schmidt: Oh yeah. Oh, they bombarded that for—I don't know, seven, eight days.

Allen: Okay. So you're coming closer and closer to what's going on?

- Schmidt: Right.
- Allen: So now, you obviously transferred off of the *Belatrix* onto something else?
- Schmidt: Yeah, that was a—I got a picture of it. [laughs] It just held one tank or one half track and twenty men.
- Allen: So you had a half track and twenty men?
- Schmidt: Yeah.
- Allen: And the idea was to run that into the beach?
- Schmidt: That's right. The ramp came down right on the beach. [laughs] While I was takin' pictures on the way in, all of a sudden we hit that goddamned beach, I threw the camera inside of my shirt, and—Oh, that was real soft sand. And I and another guy went off while some of the guys were on the half track, the guys, you know, that fired—the crew, and we were layin' in the goddamned tracks there from the half track. They had floated rations in the morning and them were in wooden boxes. Well, all of a sudden the splinters started flyin' and what not. [laughs] I said to the guy, I said, "Geez, this is no place for us; we'd better get further out." [laughs] Oh, boy, and from then on—
- Allen: You said you were in the eighth wave. What does that mean?
- Schmidt: Well, the first seven waves carried nothing but infantry. They would drop theirs and circle out and another—just in a matter of minutes, you know, they landed.
- Allen: So a wave was a group of troops?
- Schmidt: Yeah. A big row of boats came in, and then they'd back off and start circling away and the next one was right behind 'em. They wouldn't hardly clear and the next one was right there.
- Allen: Were there a lot of shells aimed at you?
- Schmidt: Them goddamned Japs, you know. That's why I say, if the United States would've used their—our officers would've used their heads—they landed too damned many troops on the beach. That beach was jammed with troops, and the Japs didn't fire at first. But when they had plenty troops there, then they opened up and, oh—
- Allen: They had a long time to—

- Schmidt: Kill them all.
- Allen: —zero their weapons in on them on the beach.
- Schmidt: Yup. They had railroad tracks under Mount Suribachi and they'd bring these guns out and fire how many rounds and back in they'd go; so, you know, they had a hell of a job knockin' 'em out.
- Allen: I don't suppose the individual boats that took you in had names to them, there were so many of them.
- Schmidt: No, no. I'm still trying to think what the hell ours—it was a landing ship something. The ones in front that carried the troops, well them were Higgins boats.
- Allen: Um, before you went in—we'll get back to being on the beach, but before you went in, you mentioned a little bit before that with all the bombardment, you figured there couldn't be a living thing on the island.
- Schmidt: Yeah, yeah.
- Allen: What were your thoughts going in? Did you think it was gonna be a cake walk?
- Schmidt: It was supposed to be a cake walk. We were supposed to take the island in seventy-two hours and then spearhead the landing on Okinawa. Here we were there for thirty-five days and there were still Japs there. Oh, boy.
- Allen: Um hmm. They totally underestimated the underground fortifications?
- Schmidt: Whoever studied that goddamned place out there surely did a damned, piss-poor job, you know. Oh man, they were underground. I went underground there I'll bet you sometimes in the caves, the tunnels, two hours at a time.
- Allen: Wow.
- Schmidt: And that's were I got the souvenirs. Well, I gave most of 'em away, but, I always got the pick of the souvenirs 'cause I was the first one in the cave. [laughs]
- Allen: I never heard about these railroad tracks. In reading about it, I imagined lots of caves and networks for a man to crawl through and come up here or—
- Schmidt: Well they were bigger than a guy could crawl through. I'll show ya. Here's—that's the landing craft I came in on. [pause]

Allen: I suppose they'd been there for years and years so you could—

Schmidt: Yeah. That's original.

Allen: Oh, that's—

Schmidt: That's the original picture that—

Allen: Rosenthal gave you?

Schmidt: Yup. Here's one when I was on burn-up detail. [laughs] There's all dead Japs layin' in there. [pause]

Allen: So you took some pictures of some of the underground stuff? Is that what you're looking for?

Schmidt: Yeah, I'm looking for that railroad. [pause] Bunch of dead Japs that were hit by the flamethrowers. [laughs] You son of a bitch.

Allen: So you were carrying this camera; were you supposed to have a camera?

Schmidt: No, no, no.

Allen: What did they tell you before you went in that you could carry?

Schmidt: Oh no. We had two canteens and that and your ammunition, bandoliers and all that kind of stuff. But I went to work, I cut the bottom out of one of the canteens, and that's what I had my camera in. [both laugh]

Allen: So you took pictures on the way in and then when you landed?

Schmidt: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. I took all told two hundred and some odd pictures.

Allen: So now you're coming onto the beach, you got twenty guys and a half track, the beach is already full of guys from the first seven waves.

Schmidt: Yeah.

Allen: Where was the half track going to go at that point?

Schmidt: Well, we got as far as the first—oh, how would I call that? [pause] Volcano ash was sort of in waves, and we got as far as one and we couldn't get over the top, so we hadda stay right there, and then we pointed our gun on Suribachi and we did our firing from there. The first day and the first night we spent on that spot. Then the next day we got over that spot and we got to another one, but that was about twelve feet high. We couldn't make that,

but by that time then they were bringin' tanks in with bulldozer stuff on and they made a road up. From then we could go wherever we wanted.

Allen: So, for the first day and a half you didn't even get off of the beach?

Schmidt: No. No.

Allen: But the Japs are still lobbing shots into there?

Schmidt: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Allen: So most of the guys that died on the beach were from shells, not bullets, right?

Schmidt: Shells and mortars, yeah. Damn few with bullets.

Allen: Okay. You can defend yourself against a guy shooting at you, but it's impossible—

Schmidt: Yeah, that's right. We were—in the first day and half, too—we each had a foxhole, one right alongside each other. That way, you know, you don't put two or three guys in a foxhole, otherwise if you get hit, all three die. Anyway, I and another guy, we each had ours alongside each other, and all of a sudden “plunk” there stood a mortar, right between us on the top there. Holy shit. We laid there for a minute. I said to the guy, I said, “Goddammit, I don't think this thing is gonna go off, but we never know.” [both laugh] Finally I said, “I'm gonna grab that thing by the fins and throw that son of a bitch.” And I did and it never did go off.

**[End of tape 1, side A]**

Schmidt: But that bugger landed not that far away from us, right between us. Oh, ho. [laughs]

Allen: Were you deep enough that if it had gone off you would've been okay?

Schmidt: Oh, I'm afraid not. No, I think we'd have got killed. Because—yeah.

Allen: Um. So what was it like at night, that first night? Or was it just so lit up—

Schmidt: No. The first night, it was dark as the ace of spades, and we had orders that nobody fires, nobody fires. And I was on the 50 caliber machine gun and my buddy was on a 30, and we was in a big foxhole there, covered with a canvas and facing Suribachi. And during the night we'd see Japs come out there and take patches off of our dead Marines that were out there, but we could not fire.

Allen: Gosh.

Schmidt: Ohhh, I tell ya.

Allen: You wish you had a bow and arrow.

Schmidt: Oh. [both laugh] Dammit.

Allen: They were worried about, what, the muzzle flash would give away your position?

Schmidt: Oh sure. Yeah. That was really scary. Goddammit. But then every night after that, that place was lit up like day. The Navy would fire shells up with parachute flares.

Allen: So they'd come down real slow and light up?

Schmidt: Yeah, yeah.

Allen: So you could work day and night, or somebody could?

Schmidt: That's right. In fact, you didn't have to worry at night, you had so many guys that would watch, you know, be on guard. Yeah, you never had to worry at night because they couldn't sneak in on you. They were good at sneakin'. Ohhhh.

Allen: As you moved forward, it wasn't like fighting someplace else, where when you took land, you know you had defeated the enemy. They were underground.

Schmidt: Well, actually where we cut the island in half—see, they were underground, Suribachi, and then where we cut the island in half, there was a lot of bunkers there but no caves in that part. So we cut the island in half the very first day. By 3 o'clock in the afternoon we cut that damn island in half.

Allen: And the airstrip was on the other side?

Schmidt: Yeah, that was on—I want to say about seven or eight days, then we had that airstrip that the B-29s were starting to land, you know, those that couldn't go any further. That's why we had to take that damn island.

Allen: By which day?

Schmidt: I wanna say about the seventh day; sixth or seventh day. Then they had bulldozers—the Marine engineers were in there, and then after a while, well

then the Seabees came in and finished the airport. Oh, golly, that was—they bulldozed, I bet you, a hundred Japanese fighter planes, you know, that were bombed all to hell; they bulldozed them off of there. The place was lined with those damn things. [laughs]

Allen: So even while that's happening, you guys were at the base of Suribachi. How did they get—you talk about going in the caves. At what point did you know that the caves were safe? You know, flamethrowers were used a lot, but—

Schmidt: Flamethrowers only went into the first—when you went in a cave, you'd go in maybe thirty, forty feet, then a branch went this way and a branch went this way. One was always a dead end. So the first guy would come in there—you had flashlights—and then he'd stick his head around and look around the corners. Then when you seen it was clear, you called another guy up, then he would watch your back, and then you'd go—when you found a dead end, well, then you didn't have to worry about that no more. And then every time you hit a corner, you looked around it and then you called another guy up, then you went to the next corner. [laughs]

Allen: Did you throw grenades ahead of you?

Schmidt: No. No.

Allen: Just a flashlight and a gun?

Schmidt: Yeah, yeah. I could hear, a lot of times I could hear 'em, but I never shot one in a cave. No, no. And you never found a rifle. It just seemed that they would hide them or [unintelligible]. I always wanted one of them little fat Buddhas, you know. You could see where they had 'em in a niche in the wall, but I never did find one of them; I think they buried 'em.

Allen: They probably buried the weapons, too, before they died.

Schmidt: Either they buried them or the other ones carried 'em off, you know, because they sure had 'em. I finally did get hold of two of 'em when I was on Iwo.

Allen: There were living conditions in those caves? There weren't just tunnels. Did they open into rooms where they actually slept?

Schmidt: Not rooms, not rooms. The tunnels were—they really weren't a tunnel. You could walk through 'em. And then the side would have a niche carved out, and there would be their straw mat, you know, that only one guy would sleep in.

- Allen: A lot of the Japanese there were killed in the caves with flamethrowers and things like that. Were there a lot of them that were coming out? You heard towards the end that there were bonsai attacks and things like that.
- Schmidt: Yeah, yeah, you didn't capture them.
- Allen: No, they wanted to die.
- Schmidt: Yup, yup. Every now and then the word would come out that we'd—they'd say, well, we gotta capture some for interrogation. Well then we would take a couple, but outside of that, I think we killed twenty thousand on the island there. And we lost twenty-four thousand, but only six thousand were killed and the rest were wounded, which lived. So that wasn't just—well, it was bad enough, but that's the only island that the Marine Corps had more casualties than the enemy.
- Allen: Although theirs were all dead and ours were—
- Schmidt: Yup. That is right. Yeah.
- Allen: We should have talked about this before. You don't have to talk about this if you don't want to, but I'm sure you lost a lot of buddies there too.
- Schmidt: Oh, Goddammit. That one day. God damn, about four or five within a minute. Up to then, by golly, I got through it pretty damn good.
- Allen: You saw the flag raising on Suribachi?
- Schmidt: Oh, yes, yes.
- Allen: Where were you when that happened?
- Schmidt: I was right below, with maybe fifty yards of the bottom of the hill.
- Allen: It's hard for me to understand how high Suribachi was. I mean, we don't have any hills around here or mountains around here.
- Schmidt: Well, I'll say five hundred feet, about five hundred feet. And then like you seen here, it was just a goddamned—well, it was a volcano.
- Allen: A big mound?
- Schmidt: Yeah. What did I say? We were there ten days and then they were putting a road up the baby already, cuttin' a zigzag. [laughs]
- Allen: Did you see both flag raisings? We all know there was the first—

- Schmidt: Well, they were one right after the other. Yeah. As long as it took to go and get a different flag really is what it—in fact, I’ve got pictures of the guys when they came off of it. It was our 28<sup>th</sup> Marines that raised that flag, you know. It was from our outfit. And I got pictures of the guys when they came down the hill marchin’ off single file.
- Allen: What was is like when the first flag went up?
- Schmidt: Oh, Christ. You should’ve—boy, that was really—everybody was hollering and, yeah. Everybody was pretty proud. Oh, here’s the story behind these, too. These are my original dog tags. Each one got a different number. One is five o seven, one four two, and the other one is five o one, seven four two. I never paid no attention to that ‘til when I came off of Iwo Jima one day, I don’t know, different guys were looking’ at ‘em and I said, “Well, I’ll be a son of a bitch, I got two different dog tags. Whoever made them buggers made that wrong.” So then they made this one. So then I—but that was after I came off of Iwo, but you can look at the number on the two bronze ones.
- Allen: Huh. Is that wild.
- Schmidt: Ain’t it? [laughs] I said, “That son of a bitch.” Yeah.
- Allen: The one four two was the right number?
- Schmidt: That’s right. Five oh seven, one four two. [laughs]
- Allen: So going back now again, when you went onto Iwo Jima, what were you carrying on your own body?
- Schmidt: I just had my rifle. The backpack, my backpack I had strapped on the half track. Yeah.
- Allen: Okay. You wanted to be mobile?
- Schmidt: That’s right.
- Allen: How did they feed you the first few days?
- Schmidt: Oh. You ate just K-rations. In fact, we never had a meal as long as we were on Iwo Jima. Never had a meal; it was all K-rations. Them goddamned dog biscuits. [laughs]
- Allen: And those came in crates like you said, they floated ‘em in and somebody passed them out, or you had to go find them yourself?

- Schmidt: Yeah, right. Well, we usually had enough on our half track and stuff, you know. But we were—being overseas twice I learned a little lesson on that one. We shipped out the second time, then I went to the staff sergeant there in the kitchen before they closed the kitchen up and I got all the fruits and stuff and put them in toolboxes on the trucks, [Allen laughs] so we had good stuff, too.
- Allen: What the heck did the Japanese survive on on that island?
- Schmidt: You know, we never—we found some barrels of fish heads and a few bags of rice, that's all we ever found there, not another Goddamned thing. Not a thing. No.
- Allen: Going back to the flag raising again, Rosenthal gave all the guys in your—
- Schmidt: Everybody got a copy from the original, yeah.
- Allen: Did you know any of these guys?
- Schmidt: Not really personally. The Indian I had talked to already, but not that I knew him, you know.
- Allen: Have you kept in touch with any of the guys from your outfit over the years?
- Schmidt: Oh, way at first, but now I haven't really—I think half of them probably are dead. Oh, I got, I do—that was the second day, yeah, second day, in the morning. I was out firing the 50 caliber machine gun at an opening in the hill on Suribachi there, and goddammit, I'm firing, firing, and all of a sudden, my buddy says, "Gosh darn, I'll help you." Well then, I stepped out from behind the gun. I said, "I'll load for ya," and he fired one burst and he said, "I'm hit." "Why, what do you mean you're hit?" Well he pulled his shirt up and there it was, a blue hole going right in. And I said, "Holy shit." He couldn't talk real good and I said, "Goddammit, I'd better get you aboard ship so you can get the hell out to the hospital ship." So by the time I got him off of the half track he had passed out and I took him with a dead man's carry and I carried him over to a Higgins boat. I said to the sailor that was guarding the thing, I said, "Can you take him out to the hospital ship?" He said, "I sure can," and away he went. They never did take the bullet out because it was so close to his—but he came back in the outfit, I don't know how many months later. Then, if you remember when they made the first heart transplant on television in Milwaukee on one of them hospitals? That was the guy, Bernard Schuler.
- Allen: Is that right?

- Schmidt: Yep, yep. That was the guy. I never got to see him after I came out of service. He lived in Elm Tree or Elmwood, Wisconsin, way on the western border. Yep. [laughs]
- Allen: They gave you a medal for that first day on the beach, right?
- Schmidt: Yeah. I got the Bronze Star here. And this is the citation that came with it.
- Allen: [reads the citation] “For heroic achievement while serving as a mechanic with half track platoon and weapons company, 28<sup>th</sup> Marines, 5<sup>th</sup> Division, in action against enemy Japanese forces on Iwo Jima, volunteering to evacuate several men who were lying wounded and helpless on the beach under heavy mortar and machine gun fire from enemy emplacements on Mount Suribachi, Private First Class Schmidt went across the beach, a distance of four hundred yards, collecting stretchers and distributing them to other Marines, in an effort to aid in the tremendous task of the Medical Corpsmen. Braving the hostile fire again and again, he assisted in the successful evacuation of more than twenty wounded Marines. His courage and devotion to duty reflect great credit upon Private First Class Schmidt and the United States Naval Service.” That’s cool. [pause] You stayed on Iwo Jima until it was secured, right?
- Schmidt: Well— [laughs]
- Allen: That was over forty days, wasn’t it?
- Schmidt: No, we were there about thirty-five days. And we thought it was secure, but two days after we left, after the Marines left, two hundred of them son of a guns in one bunch came down on this Army mess hall there, killed how many of ‘em. [laughs]
- Allen: Geez. I can’t imagine all the caves and things that they would have been in, and—
- Schmidt: Ohhhh. Oh, my, yeah.
- Allen: Maybe when we look at some of these things, some more things will come out, but let’s finish up on—after Iwo Jima, when you came off of Iwo Jima, where did you go?
- Schmidt: Then we came back to Hawaii, Camp Tarawa. And there we trained for the landing on Japan. And then that’s where we went, but they had dropped them atomic bombs so they gave up, so I went on occupation. I want to say I was in Japan about—let’s see if I’ve got the dates in there when I—

- Allen: So after thirty-five days on Iwo, you went back to Camp Tarawa, you stayed there—
- Schmidt: We trained there for the landing on, yeah—
- Allen: The bomb was dropped in August of '45? [pause]
- Schmidt: Arrived in Japan in September, yeah, but I got the date: 1945. Then I left in November of 1945 'cause I had enough points to get out.
- Allen: Then you went home?
- Schmidt: Came to San Francisco. We were there about four or five days, then we went aboard a train into Great Lakes; that's where I was discharged from.
- Allen: What was coming home like?
- Schmidt: Oh! [laughs] It was pretty nice, I'll tell you. [laughs] When we came home on the train from San Francisco, that was a goddamned troop train, and they had bunks, you know, bolted to the cars. Well, that was goddamned rough riding, and we stopped for every goddamned—it took three days, where ordinarily it would take you what—a day and a half? When I went in the Marine Corps, oh, that nice. We was on the—what the heck do you call them? Cars with the sleepers in.
- Allen: Pullmans?
- Schmidt: Pullmans, yeah. [laughs] That was pretty nice. [laughs]
- Allen: Yeah, it's not like today where you put troops on airplanes and you're here just like that.
- Schmidt: I'll bet you—I'll bet half of them are taken over by plane now. Like when they move a full division, well then they, or an army, then they take 'em by boat. But they got all that heavy equipment, you know, with 'em.
- Allen: I'd always heard that after serving in New Caledonia, fighting on Bougainville, surviving Iwo Jima, then you came back and they still wanted to send you to Korea. Tell me about that.
- Schmidt: Oh yeah. Gol-darn it. I went into the Marine Corps Reserve.
- Allen: Did you have to go in the Reserve or you wanted to?
- Schmidt: I wanted to, yeah. I volunteered for the Reserve. And by-golly, then when the Korean thing started I got a notice, one two, three. And then I sent a

letter back that I was running a farm for my dad and I'd like to have a fifteen day delay to get my brother home on the farm. By golly, they sent me thirty days. So in the meantime, my wife had twins six days before I was supposed to leave. But I didn't know this. I went down there, Oscar took me down, and they asked again, you know, how many dependents you got and all this. Well I said, "I got four now." They said, "How come you got three? You only had one when you were down here last time. No, two, that's right; your wife and a son." Well I said, "Six days ago my wife had twins." And he said, "Well, you don't have to go to service then. You can get out." But then I said to him, "Gol-darn it, with the training I've got," I said, "Goddammit, if I could go and train I wouldn't mind; I'd still go in." He said, "With the training you've got, you'd be on the next goddamned plane that goes over there." [both laugh] Well then I said, "Then I owe it to the family to stay out." And that's the best thing that happened. When I came out I said, "Well, as long as I'm off of the damned farm now, I always wanted to work in Milwaukee. So goddammit, I went to Milwaukee and goddammit it turned out good. [laughs] [phone interruption]"

- Allen: When you were in the Marine Reserves, where was the outfit? Were you—
- Schmidt: I was not in the—
- Allen: You were just in the Reserve. That just meant you were subject to call, you didn't have to go and train on weekends or anything like that? That was just the status of being in the Reserves?
- Schmidt: No.
- Allen: So after the War, then you got off the farm, you worked at Continental Can?
- Schmidt: Yeah. And I retired from there, thirty-two and half years later. [laughs]
- Allen: Well, let's look at some of the pictures. I suppose once the action started, nobody worried about whether somebody had a camera or not. [laughs]
- Schmidt: No.
- Allen: You probably would've got in trouble if they knew you were takin' it in, but once you were in—
- Schmidt: Yeah.
- Allen: Was this just any half track, or was that the one that you went—

- Schmidt: That was the one I was—we had, we had four: one in reserve and then one for each—26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup>.
- Allen: I guess most people just don't understand how much iron was floating out there; how many boats and—
- Schmidt: Ohhhhh. Jesus Christ, no.
- Allen: And then thousands of guys traveling over. I mean, the equipment left behind, it must have been like a junkyard.
- Schmidt: Well, I'll tell you, that sort of got us plenty mad. Before we could leave Iwo we had to police up that Goddamned place. [Allen laughs] That's right; all the shell casings, everything had to be hauled; dumped into the ocean. Yeah.
- Allen: Wow. I always wondered about that. I've been to Europe a number times and I've spent a lot of time in Luxembourg and around where the Battle of the Bulge was, and if you look at pictures, tanks and half tracks and jeeps and weapons and things laying everywhere, you wonder after the War—
- Schmidt: Oh, yeah.
- Allen: Now, you had an ocean to throw it in. I don't know if they just dug big pits and threw it in and buried it.
- Schmidt: That's how we did with the Japs, dead ones. We buried maybe five hundred in one pile.
- Allen: Take a bulldozer—
- Schmidt: Cover 'em up.
- Allen: Yeah. But what about the Marine dead?
- Schmidt: Oh no, them we piled up, covered them with tarps until they started making a cemetery. They started making that cemetery already—Goddammit, I'll bet you on the fourth, fifth day. Ohhhh—You can't imagine. Like the Japs, you know, they laid there—some of 'em must of laid there two or three weeks, and you'd take 'em by the leg and their leg pulls off. Put a wire around their head and their head pulls off. Ohhhhh, did that stink. Ohhhh. Lot of guys couldn't—everybody was supposed to go on burial detail one day because it was really, really rough. Some guys couldn't. [laughs] They was heavin' all the time. [laughs]
- Allen: But your guys you took care of early?

- Schmidt: Oh, yeah. Yup. They were put in body bags. [pause] This is when they first started the cemetery, a buddy of mine was killed and buried there, and son of a bitch, I took a picture and the reflection from the god-darned sun or whatever, you know, it blurred that. John T. Smith; I'll never forget that guy.
- Allen: So they actually, they probably had all these crosses premade in anticipation of this?
- Schmidt: No, they made the, they made the crosses. I can tell you another story about the cemetery. They started it off in the form of a cross, and there was so many dead ones, they had to fill in the corners.
- Allen: Wow. So actually after the beginning of the battle, you're saying that a shop or something that was set up that made the crosses? They didn't come off of a ship?
- Schmidt: No, no. I think they brought the—if I remember right, they brought the lumber and they made 'em right—
- Allen: And put the Marine insignia on it and printed the guy's name and everything?
- Schmidt: And one of the dog tags got put on there. Yeah.
- Allen: So all of those guys were brought back eventually?
- Schmidt: I would imagine so.
- Allen: I don't think there's a cemetery there now.
- Schmidt: Yeah.
- Allen: Well here's a—is that what you were looking for before?
- Schmidt: That's it. That's the one we were looking for.
- Allen: Railroad track coming in there, so they'd run a gun out on that and—
- Schmidt: Yeah, yeah. But I went in those under Suribachi later on. [laughs]
- Allen: [pause] When you slept, I see this—I don't know what this was.

- Schmidt: That was a—we were, we dug, oh, about two feet below the ground and then we had that tarp from our truck and about six of us slept there; that was on Iwo.
- Allen: The tarp was for what? Did it rain there while you were there at all?
- Schmidt: Oh, goddammit, I don't think it did. I don't think it did. But it got plenty chilly at night. Oh, goddammit, that was chilly. Oh, I gotta tell you, too, about that one thing. You know, you always argue religion and what not, and we had a Marine gunner and he was an atheist, I mean an atheist first class. And then on Iwo, I'll be a son of a gun, I would say, too, this is about maybe the seventh or eighth day or night, and we came under Japanese artillery fire. And boy, I mean, they hit our camp right dead center. Another guy and I were in a pup tent, and it was so damn hard up there, we didn't dig down, so we laid our stomach and put the helmet, you know, over our faces or on the back of our heads. And boy, thirteen holes were through that pup tent, the next morning, from shrapnel, and neither one of us got hit.
- Allen: Wow.
- Schmidt: Anyway, all of a sudden the next morning I hear a guy hollering, he says, "Smitty, Smitty. Come over here once." So I go and there was that Marine gunner. He said, "Smitty," he said, "Last night when we came under that artillery fire," he said, "I was saying somethin'." He said, "I never prayed in my life, but I was saying somethin'." [both laugh] I always said there's no atheist in a foxhole.
- Allen: Yeah, that's what they say.
- Schmidt: Yup. He said, "I was sayin' somethin'." [laughs]
- Allen: Now this picture says, "War dog."
- Schmidt: Oh, yeah. We had at least fifty to sixty Dobermans and what not. Some of them were trained for taking messages back and forth, but some were killers, you know, trained for that. Oh, them Japanese were afraid of them. Oh, oh, my oh my. They sent them in the caves, boy, they emptied 'em out. [both laugh] Yeah, yeah.
- Allen: What's this a picture of?
- Schmidt: Land mines.
- Allen: Is that your half track?

- Schmidt: No, that's a tank, ain't it? Yeah, that's a tank. Yeah. We put that—that's corrugated there, and between that corrugated is sawdust so that they couldn't snap a land mine. They had some with good heavy magnets, you know; they'd put that on there—
- Allen: So it was like insulation?
- Schmidt: Right, yeah. [laughs]
- Allen: That was clever.
- Allen: So are they Jap guns?
- Schmidt: Yeah. That's one of their—
- Allen: I remember the rifle that you lent to me—
- Schmidt: That gun there, we fired from that one spot there, fifteen hundred rounds, with our 75 millimeter there, and I said to the gunner, "You think you could hit that sucker?" "Oh," he said, "I think so." About the third round he hit that son of a bitch. [both laugh] Yeah.
- Allen: Who is that?
- Schmidt: That's me.
- Allen: Is it?
- Schmidt: Yeah, sure.  
**[End of Tape 1, Side B]**
- Schmidt: With a Jap cap on. [both laugh] Yeah, that's me.
- Allen: Is that one of the rifles you brought back?
- Schmidt: Yeah, that's on Iwo. That's taken on Iwo.
- Allen: I was telling you the other week: I remember borrowing one of those rifles to go deer hunting when I was a kid.
- Allen: Wow. Here's another one of the cemetery. I think you said you had to take three shots to get it all in.
- Schmidt: But this is when they first started the cemetery. You can see there's not too much done there yet. I got some more in the cemetery in here.

- Allen: This must have been right after the—
- Schmidt: There, that is right on the beach. Yeah. That's where the guys are going on.
- Allen: So what were you thinking? You're on the beach, the shells are fallin' all around, and you take out your camera to take pictures. I mean does that seem crazy now?
- Schmidt: It does, it does. But goddamn, you know, when I first got on Iwo, goddammit, I seen a shell layin' there from a rifle; you know, a spent one. I stuck it in my pocket and I said, "Well, I think that's the one that was meant for me." And goddammit, I went where I wanted to go and I never—and mortar shells would go off—I'm going to tell you, mortar shells went off next to me from here to where your outfit[?] is standing. Ohhh.
- Allen: Wow.
- Schmidt: [unintelligible] would stick in your neck and whatnot, but I never got it, never got it except the heel[?] Nope, nope. [laughs]
- Allen: That's unbelievable.
- Schmidt: Yeah, it really is.
- Allen: A lot of guys did make it, but a lot of guys didn't. It makes you wonder why you were picked one way or the other.
- Schmidt: Yeah. [pause]
- Allen: Where was that?
- Schmidt: That's over at Sasebo where we landed in the occupation of Japan. That was the biggest Naval Base that the Japanese had, that's where we landed.
- Allen: This, too?
- Schmidt: Yeah, yeah.
- Allen: You should probably write that on the back. Sasebo?
- Schmidt: Yeah. S-A-S-E-B-O. That other one there, too. Let's see that one. Yeah, that was there too. And that was up at a Naval camp in Japan. I stayed there, I don't know, about, three, four, five days. And they were fixing the roof. [laughs]
- Allen: It looks like this one is, too. And where is that?

Schmidt: Yeah, that was down at the docks there too at Sasebo. That was Japanese. Goddamn, we were there I'll bet you two weeks before we ever seen a woman. [Allen laughs] Yeah, I don't know if they were told that we were gonna kill the women, or what the hell. They had them back in the mountains. [laughs]

Allen: So that's Sasebo, Japan?

Schmidt: Yeah.

Allen: This must be back on Iwo. Oh, yeah, we had those before.

Schmidt: Yeah, that's different kind of guns: Hotchkiss, machine guns and what have ya.

Allen: A pile of dead Japanese there.

Schmidt: That's the guys when they're coming off of Iwo from puttin' the flag up.

Allen: And now I can see in this picture is good; it shows where you came in.

Schmidt: That's right, when the old shit is flyin' there, when the shells are going off on Suribachi, yeah.

Allen: You can see Suribachi in the background.

Schmidt: Yeah, yup. That was taken probably right when I was layin' in that—close to the water's edge yet. [laughs]

Allen: And what was that?

Schmidt: That's a dead Jap there.

Allen: With a couple of your buddies?

Schmidt: Yeah.

Allen: This looks like grave duty.

Schmidt: Yeah, that's where they're digging the graves. [silence] That's on Iwo too.

Allen: Some kind of a cave?

Schmidt: Yeah, that's where—every one of them flags I got pictures of there, I'm the guy that got them, and I gave them to the guys. I kept some, but—

- Allen: That's an amazing picture. They built that picket fence around there.
- Schmidt: Yep. I think there might be a few more in there on that.
- Allen: Yeah. How long did it take? It was probably way after the war when they took all those bodies out.
- Schmidt: Oh, I'm sure. Yeah.
- Allen: What is that?
- Schmidt: That's my buddy, that I told ya—Oh no, I didn't tell you about this guy. There's picture—just set that here and then if we get the other picture then I'll—that's right. That's the father of that baby there. And he got shot right dead center through the head. He was carrying a flamethrower and the Japs were afraid of them. Boy they—when you strapped a flamethrower on, that was your death sentence. Yup.
- Allen: So this was taken at Tarawa before you went—
- Schmidt: Yeah. That was taken in the United States here at Pendleton.
- Allen: Pendleton?
- Schmidt: Yeah.
- Allen: Tell me about some of the stuff in the box.
- Schmidt: That's a Japanese hand grenade, [laughs] but I took the powder out; I disarmed it.
- Allen: How did you do that? You just screwed it open?
- Schmidt: Yeah. I'll show ya. [pause] And that was—you had to take it out, stick it in here and here and then you could take it—I don't know if I can get this out—and their hand grenades were different than ours. They had to have a big rock or goddammit—or they'd—first you had to pull this pin, because that was where the firing pin was here, then you'd hit it on your helmet and then that set it off and then it had so many seconds before it went off, so you hadda know if you had a three second, four second or five second, like our grenades too. Otherwise if you got a three second and think you got a five—[both laugh]
- Allen: So they had to go through an extra action, hitting on a rock or their helmet?

- Schmidt: Yeah. And this pouch here, that's an officer's pouch. That's genuine leather, where the regular guys, the Japanese, theirs was made out of sort of a belting, a webbing. That's an oil can for their rifle and whatever, yeah. This is that stamp I told you about.
- Allen: Oh, yeah. [pause] There are changeable numbers in there.
- Schmidt: Well, there—
- Allen: I wonder if it's a postmark.
- Schmidt: I don't know what the whole thing was, but Japanese numbers are the same as our numbers.
- Allen: Yeah, I see that.
- Schmidt: They had no numbers of their own.
- Allen: But you never did find out what that said?
- Schmidt: No. No. I took—that came out of the same cave as where them spurs came out of. Something tells me that that was the general, because the Japanese generals are the only ones that had a horse, usually a white horse. But I never seen no horse on Iwo. [laughs] They probably ate the son of a gun. [both laugh]
- Allen: All it says on here is Osaka.
- Schmidt: Osaka, yeah.
- Allen: Where it was made. They're not very fancy spurs, but they're spurs.
- Schmidt: No, no.
- Allen: What else is in there?
- Schmidt: That's all different Japanese insignias there, Naval and what have you. Here's a Japanese artillery watch; I'll explain it. It's really a stopwatch. When they would fire, they'd press the button, then the sweep hand would go and when the shell would go off, they pressed it again, then they'd know how many seconds it took to get there, and they knew how fast that bullet traveled, so then they knew how far away it was. There you can see all the different Japanese—that's a good watch, but goddammit, it don't work any more. And, I've got a couple—
- Allen: Chopsticks?

- Schmidt: Yup. Here's another set. I had quite a few of these opium pipes, but I gave most of them away. [both laugh] You had one made out of—
- Allen: I guess if you're going to be underground for months and years, you gotta have something to keep you morale up. [laughs] It looks like he pinned it to his—oh, no, that's magnifying—there's another one there.
- Schmidt: Yeah. And here is one of their little army things for opening cans.
- Allen: Oh, a can opener.
- Schmidt: Yeah. This is our compass.
- Allen: This is the pad for the—it's all in English. Or did you get this—oh, no, this is Japanese.
- Schmidt: Yeah. There were a lot of numbers and stuff and whatever they copied from somebody else they had, you know; they made nothing on their own in their life, I don't think.
- Allen: But after that, they made everything.
- Schmidt: Yeah. That's Japanese dog tags. Some Navy insignias. [laughs] They had Japanese Marines on that island, they were big guys and they were all Navy guys. [pause] That was prayer cards. You can pull that out. Just about every Jap had one of them.
- Allen: Almost like one of our medals that you might carry for religious—
- Schmidt: Yeah, religious. Like here, too, I don't know, really, what the heck they say, but everyone had one.
- Allen: Wow. And different types of pockets, too, that they came in.
- Schmidt: Yeah, yeah. And their billfolds were all made out of cloth like this and what not.
- Allen: This is probably the guy's name in here.
- Schmidt: Yeah. Oh, here; you know what this is? That's one of our booby trap detonators. Now here, I would like to know what the hell it says on it. That's one of their really good battle flags. Where the heck can I get that all the way open? There.

- Allen: You know what I could do; I have a digital camera and I could take a picture of it.
- Schmidt: Yah, I often wondered what that writing all was.
- Allen: Yeah. It might be the names of the guys, but it might be—I'm trying to figure out which side is; this has gotta be the front.
- Schmidt: This gotta be the front, yeah.
- Allen: 'Cause this is the bleed through on it.
- Schmidt: That's silk. [pause; various noises] That's their good luck pieces.
- Allen: Oh, the belts.
- Schmidt: [unintelligible] Yeah. They wore them around here—the flags they had tied on a string down their neck, but these they always had around the stomach.
- Allen: So the guys actually carried these?
- Schmidt: Oh yeah, oh yeah.
- Allen: So you think the writing on here came from home? That they did this before they left? It would be interesting to find out.
- Schmidt: Yeah. You know, that's ordinary solid[?] stitch, next side to each other. But I, something tells me that this got more to do with oh, a company flag or something like that more than a personal flag. And you know, the big numbers here, that would probably tell the story.
- Allen: Yeah. But every guy carried one of these or just certain guys in the outfit?
- Schmidt: Nope, a heck of a lot of Japanese had them, but not fancy ones likes this; they just had the Rising Sun on there. Some had a little bit of writing, but some didn't have none at all. I'd say nine out of ten had these\_\_\_\_\_ [?] belts. Oh, that came from the Solomon Islands, yeah, yeah. That's rosewood inlaid with mother of pearl. I brought that back from Vella Lavella.
- Allen: Huh. [pause] I think I am going to lay this down and take a picture of it. Like I told you, I have a good friend at work who has a friend in Japan, and we can e-mail that picture over to her and she can tell us what it says.
- Schmidt: Yeah, I often wondered what the heck— [long pause, no conversation]

Allen: Do you have a favorite picture that you'd like to go in the book?

Schmidt: Maybe; let me look through these here. [long pause, no conversation]

Allen: I'll take a close-up of that stamp, too, and see if we can find out what that says.

Schmidt: Oh. Can you take it that close?

Allen: Yes, yes [long pause] This is all backwards. Well, I can flip the picture over on the computer. Or if you have another picture of you, just in your uniform or whatever; I know my Ma's got some.

Schmidt: Yeah.

Allen: But it's up to you.

Schmidt: Most of the gol-darned pictures like that my kids got. I got—I wouldn't mind getting' one of them in there. How many pictures do you usually put in there? Only about two or whatever?

Allen: One or two. In fact, I'd probably like to keep it to one, because then I can write more, because the more pictures, then you don't— [pause]

Schmidt: Can you see that picture right away?

Allen: Yeah.

Schmidt: Well, I'll be a son of a gun. Oh boy. Goddamn.

Allen: Like that one is no good, so I can erase it right away and have more room for other ones that I shot. All the different settings and all.

Schmidt: I'll be a son of a gun. [laughs]

Allen: These things are amazing.

Schmidt: I've gotta tell ya, too, when we came back from the occupation of Japan, we came through the China Sea, the north route home, and that was so goddamned rough, and I was always smart enough, when I got on a troop transport, I learned that the trip over, always take the top bunk; that way, nobody pukes down on you. [Allen laughs] Anyway, that was so rough and I was on that top bunk there, and I was hangin' on the I-beam there, that ship went up and down. I said to the Lord, "God-darn, Lord, you let me get through the whole war and now you want to drown me." [both laugh] Yeah. Oh, did that thing—up and down, jeepers. [laughs] [pause]

- Allen: Can you hold that one? That one is pretty neat.
- Schmidt: Yeah, that's a dandy. One of them that I had, had all kinds of old coins, but goddammit, I don't know what the hell happened with them. [pause]
- Allen: Hang on. Okay, look up here. I want to have you hold this flag, too. Well, you know, of course, she'll know what's the right side. I think you can tell which is—that looks fine. Can you stand up with it? [pause] I wonder what that says on there too?
- Schmidt: Yeah. Well, I know it's an artillery watch.
- Allen: It could be a name.
- Schmidt: Yeah. [pause] I told Floyd Keller[?] and them guys that were in the Navy, I said, "I had more goddamned time going from one island to another aboard ship than you guys had when you were in the Navy." [both laugh]
- Allen: Yeah, I don't think a lot of people realize how much time—
- Schmidt: Well, like myself, being over twice and to go to Japan, that's a long ways. [laughs] Yeah, I told the guys, when it's too goddamned tough for you, it's just right for me. [both laugh] That was my motto. [pause]

**[End of Tape 2, Side A]**

- Allen: I heard \_\_\_\_\_? had a birthday the other day.
- Schmidt: Yeah, eighty-eight. Yeah, I remember when Melvin was up from Texas, then we took pictures and said this will probably be the last time the whole gang will be together, and by golly, sure enough, Nick died. Yup. I imagine we've got to expect a few more. We're all so darned old. [laughs]
- Allen: How old were you when you went in?
- Schmidt: I was nine—no, let's see twenty. No, I was actually nineteen. I went in the seventh of December and I was twenty on the twenty-second.
- Allen: And when you went into Iwo Jima, you were what, twenty-three, twenty-two?
- Schmidt: Twenty-three. Twenty-three.
- Allen: 1945?

- Schmidt: Yeah.
- Allen: [pause] Did they give you the Bronze Star right after the battle, or did—
- Schmidt: Yeah, I got that. [abruptly cut off; blank on tape] This one here was a sergeant, his name was Phillip McGregor. And this guy here, goddammit, I cannot think of his name, but that was Phillip McGregor. He was really a good friend of mine. I took him along to the foxholes one day—or not the foxholes, the tunnels and stuff. And when he got back why he pert near croaked that he did something like that. We called him Foxhole, is what we called him, you know, because he was—oh, he was [laughs]. Phillip McGregor from New York.
- Allen: I wanted to ask you, what was the deal with the ties?
- Schmidt: Well, we all decided that day to dress up a little bit. [both laugh]
- Allen: Why would you have taken a tie?
- Schmidt: I don't really know how come we had ties in our outfit, in our knapsacks.
- Allen: 'Cause you think you would have left that on the ship.
- Schmidt: Yeah, yeah.
- Allen: Was that where the bulk of you personal items were?
- Schmidt: No, we left nothing on the ship; whatever we brought—our sea bags and stuff, that stayed over in Hawaii. But whatever personal stuff we had, we had right in our knapsacks.
- Allen: Yeah. It seems strange that one of the things that they would tell you to take, or you decided to take—
- Schmidt: Oh, no, they didn't tell us to take that, I just had that throwed in there. These two guys I know, that was Walter—goddammit, now, umm, why can't I think of that last name. He was from Strawn, Illinois, and he told me, he said, "Goddammit, I think the division where my brother is is gonna be comin' on the island here." You know, we needed reinforcements. That's his brother. He met his brother on Iwo.
- Allen: Ohhh. Wow.
- Schmidt: This one, I think—
- Allen: That's you.

- Schmidt: Yeah.
- Allen: Are these Jap guns?
- Schmidt: Actually, them are English guns. The Japanese were great at copying every goddamned thing. They never—anything above a rifle they copied from some other country, and even their rifles. Their rifles were all made in the backyard, they were made by gunsmiths, not in the factories. The parts were not interchangeable. If you got something wrong with one gun, and thought you were gonna take a piece off of another to fix it, that didn't work. [Allen laughs] No, they was each one separate. That one here, that's a British Hotchkiss; that's a World War I gun.
- Allen: Do you remember who that guy was?
- Schmidt: I know his last name was Tieg, but I cannot remember his first name—Albert, Albert Tieg. He got shot also through the leg.
- Allen: Was he one of the guys in your group of twenty?
- Schmidt: Yeah, he was on the same, yeah.
- Allen: What was that?
- Schmidt: That was a 57 artillery piece, a Jap's.
- Allen: And I was looking close at this. Do they have some prisoners here?
- Schmidt: Yeah, we took—that one day, I remember takin' a picture; we took about six or seven prisoners.
- Allen: I was surprised how many prisoners there were. I read something the other day there were a thousand prisoners on Iwo Jima.
- Schmidt: Where'd you read that? Well they must have took nine hundred after we left. [both laugh]
- Allen: Because I thought every one of them—I talked to a guy a while back that fought on Tarawa, and he said there were like seventeen prisoners and they were all Korean slaves. He said not a single Jap gave himself up.
- Schmidt: Like I said, we had a couple Jap prisoners and we sent them into caves to get the other Japs to come out. They wouldn't come out, no way they'd come out.

Allen: You had an interpreter that would say to them—

Schmidt: Yeah, we had some enough guys that we had captured, you know, and then we'd have 'em go in there, but no. They were lucky they weren't shot themselves, you know, for going in there.

Allen: Yeah, yeah. For not having—

Schmidt: That's Phillip McGregor there too.

Allen: With the rifle?

Schmidt: Yeah, yeah. Like I said, that's where they're coming off of Suribachi when they put the flag up. Turned out pretty nice.

Allen: Yeah. The guy you had the picture of with the baby, you said was killed—

Schmidt: Oh, Henry Schmith. Henry S-c-h-m-i-t-h. Yeah, Henry Schmith.

Allen: Say that again.

Schmidt: S-c-h-m-i-t-h. Schmith.

Allen: But not the regular spelling of Smith?

Schmidt: No. No, no.

Allen: Okay. And his name was John?

Schmidt: John, John; not Henry.

Allen: John T. Schmith. That was the one you had the single cross picture.

Schmidt: That's right, yeah. Yeah, that's the one right here. That damn sun, you know, reflected from the paint, and with that cheap camera there—I sent his folks a picture, but—

Allen: Oh, you did?

Schmidt: Oh, yeah.

Allen: Where was he from?

Schmidt: Ah, what'd I say? Smitty was from Henry, Illinois. And Tony Walters was the other guy I was telling you about before—Tony, Tony Walters. He was from, ah, one was from Henry and one was from Strawn Illinois.

- Allen: Was the second guy the one that met his brother? Ward?
- Schmidt: Wally—actually, now I know his real name. His real name was Shirley[?] but we never called him by his first name. Tony, we called him. Tony Walters.
- Allen: And was he the guy that met his brother?
- Schmidt: Yeah, yeah.
- Allen: Okay.
- Schmidt: Oh, that was, that was Abe Tallman, and that was another guy, his name—look at that big boot there. Shirley[?] Peters; nobody ever called that guy Shirley, let me tell ya. They called him Pete.
- Allen: That's the three of you standing where, back in California?
- Schmidt: Yep, that was in the San Onofre Valley where we were training to go to Iwo. [laughs] That's little Abe on the big engine motorcycle; pert near killed him.
- Allen: Do you remember where this group in front of this half track, where that picture was taken?
- Schmidt: That's taken on Iwo Jima. I cannot think of his name, but this was our corpsman. And, oh, he was one good corpsman, let me tell ya. But he would step one foot aboard ship and he got seasick. And he had a little puppy and that son of a bitch got seasick. [laughs] That's when we were aboard ship; that's one of the guns that was aboard ship. This was taken over in Hawaii, this one here was taken in the States. You can see the color of the pictures are different. [pause] Yeah, that was, what'd I say his name was? Not Henry—John. Yeah. A nice guy, goddammit. Put him in—gave him a goddamned—he was in the headquarters company, you know, and like I told you, when the Marines go, everybody gotta—so they, the guys with the flamethrowers, they were all getting' killed, so he hadda put one on and 1-2-3, he got it right through the head. Yeah.
- Allen: Is that a Japanese plane?
- Schmidt: Yep, that's a seaplane; that's a chasuble[?]. There wasn't much left there. There was one place there, I don't know why the hell I never took that picture. I'll bet there was five hundred kamikaze boats with explosives in the tip, lined up, one after the other, one after the other, for when we'd invade. Then they stood in there. And goddammit, what always amazed me,

we got there in the morning at I'd say 10 o'clock—well, maybe 9 o'clock, and they said, "We gotta get the ship unloaded, because if it's in here after 2 o'clock, we can't take it out because the tide starts going out." And you can't believe it, them big ships would come in there in the morning, and in the afternoon if they weren't gone, they stood in the mud. There was at least a forty foot tide. And they're—where they built the submarines and all that, then they had a big dugout dug through there and then steel doors. If they brought a ship in dry dock, they'd bring it in at high tide, then they just left them stand there, and when the tide went out, they'd close the doors, didn't even have to pump the water out; it ran out all by itself. It was really something.

Allen: Do you remember what this was? These parts? It looks like—

Schmidt: Oh yes. That all—now that's buried tank, what they had. But this here is alongside of the airstrip when we had bulldozed all that. There was hundreds and hundreds of planes that we bulldozed off of there that were—

Allen: And was this one of our tanks that's smoking here?

Schmidt: Yep, yep, that was one of ours. In fact we lost two of them there, that tank went and hit a land mine, so the next tank in the back thought he would just go around him. They weren't so dumb, either; they had another land mine over there. And then when that one was knocked out, behind the hill there they had a goddamned gun emplacement for the next one that come.

Allen: Do you remember where these were taken, these pictures of these ships?

Schmidt: This is the *USS Mississippi* firing on Suribachi.

Allen: That's the one on the right here? Okay.

Schmidt: Yeah. This son of a gun here, I don't know. That's an LST, but I don't know really what—but the gol-darned *Mississippi* stood off of Suribachi, they fired, and they fired. I got so tired; it was rippin' my ears out. Oh. Bill Smith[?] was on the *Mississippi*, from Lake Church. That was \_\_\_\_ [?] brother.

Allen: What was this vehicle?

Schmidt: That was an Alligator. An Alligator—it has full tracks. It can go in the water or on land. Yeah, Alligator. Boy, they rode pretty low in the water, because they were heavy. The same way with those—I ain't got one picture there of those goddamned ducks that brought all that equipment in, goddammit. The first wave that came in that brought supplies in, that was all manned by colored drivers, you know. They went out to sea and them

son of a guns, they hadda go and get 'em; they wouldn't come back.  
[unintelligible]

Allen: [laughs]

Schmidt: They said, "Everybody is dead up there, don't go up there." They would head straight out to sea, they'd go right by their ship, and they weren't going back, no way.

Allen: Wow. Now I should have written this down. What was the name of this; these were the brothers.

Schmidt: Tony. Tony Walters was this guy, and the other one, I don't know what the heck his first name was.

Allen: But Tony Walters' first name was really Shirley?

Schmidt: Shirley, yeah.

Allen: Okay. Oh, I think the last thing I want to do, I want to get a picture of those prayer cards, too, to get those translated.

**[End of interview]**