

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an Oral History Interview with

ROGER P. SCOVILL

Artilleryman, USMC, World War II

1997

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Scovill, Roger P., b. 1921. Oral History Interview, 1997.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 90 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Recordings: 1 sound cassette (ca. 90 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract

Scovill, a Madison (Wis.) native, discusses his experiences serving in World War II as an officer, artilleryman, and Silver Star recipient with Battery M, 4th Battalion, 10th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division . He describes his decision to drop out of the University of Wisconsin-Madison to enlist, boot camp, assignment as an artillery operator, and weapons training. He details his experiences installing an Army base in Reykjavik (Iceland) and difficulty obtaining construction supplies. Scovill provides an in-depth account of his experiences on Tarawa and Saipan (specifically the fighting at Charan Kanoa and Garapan) and the difficulties his group faced in those battles. He details the process of setting up artillery, surveying, different types of artillery weapons, Japanese resistance, burial of dead Japanese and American soldiers, and emotions upon learning that the Enola Gay took off from the airfield he defended. Also included is a description of his post-war experiences with the G.I. Bill at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, employment at Oscar-Meyer, and his marriage and children that followed.

Biographical Sketch

Scovill (b. June 30, 1921) entered the Marine Corps midway through his second year at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He received the Silver Star for his actions in the south Pacific. After the war, he returned to Madison, Wisconsin.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1997.

Transcribed by Nathan King, 2003.

Transcription edited by Abigail Miller, 2003.

Interview Transcript

- Mark: Today's Date is September the 16th, 1997. This is Mark Van Ells, archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum. We're doing an oral history interview this afternoon with Mr. Roger P. Scovill. Did I pronounce that correctly?
- Scovill: That is correct.
- Mark: A native of Madison, Wisconsin, a veteran of the United States Marine Corps during World War II. Good afternoon, and thanks for coming in today.
- Scovill: Well, thank you for this opportunity to make a record of the facts as they were observed by me in my World War II experiences with the United States Marines.
- Mark: I suppose we should start by having you tell me just a little bit about where you were born and raised, and what you were doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.
- Scovill: I was born here in Madison, Wisconsin, Dane County at the Madison General Hospital to my mother Ida Christensen – her maiden name – Scovill – and my father was Phillip Astor Scovill. I was the second child. I had a brother – he died without any children to tarry on for his light (??). My first recollection of education was at Emerson High School, sorry, Emerson Grade School on Madison's east side out on East Johnson Street, where I did very poorly in the opinion of the teachers. However, in my book, you will find references to their grading where, in my opinion, they failed to reach me rather than me failing to gather the information they were trying to give to me. The book, by the way, is named What Did You Do, Grandpa? And it is a documentation of my experiences as an enlisted man with the Marine Corps, a memoir of World War II artillery experiences. After grade school, I went into East High School, and there you will find that I made four or five very close friends, which are mentioned in the book. The primary additional friend that I have mentioned in this book, a lifetime friend, is John Wasick (??), who has also been a lifelong resident of Madison. John and I enlisted in the Marine Corps at the same time on the same day. We actually had intended to go into the Navy. Prior to that time -- after graduation from high school, and at the end of high school -- Germany was extending its realm over much of Europe, and while our country had intended to be out of any conflict involvement, nevertheless we were pulled into the war by the act of the Japanese at Pearl Harbor. However, both John and I had decided to go on to the University, and we did complete our freshman year at the University of Wisconsin here in Madison, and had begun our sophomore year. However, during the sophomore year, neither John nor I were making good grades, which would be needed to have on your resumé to show that you were a good student. So that, along with the concern that we would soon be involved in the war, we decided that we wanted to dictate our own destiny rather than be subject to a draft. So, we cut class one morning, as is explained in the book, and went to the United States Navy recruiting office in the federal building, which is across from the Madison City Hall on what was formerly known as Monona Drive at that time. It's been changed to King Avenue, and

now the Frank Lloyd Wright center is located at the end of that street in Madison. We then went into the Marine Corps directly on the next day. We were given the remainder of that day of enlistment to wrap up our civilian things are sent to Milwaukee with the idea that we may be returned for a later indoctrination, but that never occurred. We went directly from there to Chicago, and into the Marine Corps and on to the training that was necessary.

Mark: I want you to just describe that training to me. How long did it take, what sort of training did you do? And also, you went in very, very early – before Pearl Harbor –

Scovill: Before –

Mark: - so I'm interested in sort of equipment you had. What your perspective on whether or not the country was prepared, militarily, to enter the war.

Scovill: This was a rude awakening. Our training in the Marine Corps, which was known as boot – every recruit was known as a boot – and the recruit training was the boot camp training. It was done for John and I – the Midwest was sent out to San Diego training center, and there was a Marine Corps base at San Diego, California. There was also a training center where the Eastern states were shipped to the east coast training center somewhere, I believed at what is presently known as Camp LeJune, was the camp where the training was done for marines on the Eastern states. The boot camp training was a three month, 12 week course. Very, very concentrated training through every phase that was known at that time to prepare us for what our experiences might be during combat. At the end of the training, you were lined up and counted off numbers and simply by number one to ten, “Step forward five steps, you fellas are to go to radio school,” or communication school, or to sea school, or whatever function they chose. There was no such thing as “Oh, boy, I'm gonna be trained as a artilleryman,” or some other function, in that you were simply the luck o' the draw is the way that it went. After that training, it was still prior to our involvement in the World War with Germany and the Axis people that were involved there, which was also a shock in learning eventually how many nations actually worked with Germany in their conquest of Europe. And we then were shipped, after our training was completed, to Camp Elliot, which at that time was just in the building stage. It was a camp for Marines that was north of San Diego, California, near the coast about ten or fifteen miles inland, and south of the other major cities of California that are so well known, such as Los Angeles and Long Beach. This was out in what we called, as a Marine Corps description, boondocks. It was just land that was virtually useless as far as agricultural or development purposes was concerned, and filled with cactus and reptiles and other things that made life difficult and unpleasant. It did not, at that time, even have the fineries of plumbing. In fact, we had to dig our own latrines, which we called “heads” in the Marine Corps, which were deep pits – went down eighteen feet. And if you can imagine digging, by hand, pick and shovel, eighteen feet down, you can realize that it had to be shoveled again and again and again before it could be thrown out and into trucks and hauled away. At least they gave us trucks to haul ‘em away in, the spoils away in – we didn't have to carry it away by hand. A “head” was large enough for forty or fifty marines to be imbuing at one time. And as I recall the dimensions were, oh fifteen or twenty feet wide, and thirty or forty feet long. So this was no little hole to dig by hand. And then as the camp developed, ultimately they did obtain sewage treatment facilities. Our training there also

involved our first experiences in being trained for Marine Corps assault landings using the old troop ships which were very beautiful navy ships in those days. As far as equipment was concerned, during our boot camp training we had been trained with the 1903 Springfield rifle, which was supposed to be considered our best friend as a marine, and it was our most reliable thing that we could depend upon. And it was a very accurate weapon to have training with. We also were trained with the .45 pistol, with bayonets, we went through gas training, through all of the training that involved crawling through barbed wire and other impediments under simulated fire, and these type of things. Then we were given just light introductions, not an opportunity to fire, unless they had set us aside after boot camp, for training for machine guns or other equipment of that sort – were given introductory opportunities to see and know how these weapons were used so that we could ultimately be trained to utilize those weapons as well. The food was outstanding. No one could justify any complaints about food that we were served as recruits. However, anything that was received in the mail from our relatives or friends had to be distributed among the entire platoon as a boot. This was so that we would not disturb our appetite and not eat a good solid meal for the severity of the training that we underwent throughout our boot camp experiences.

Mark: And was it severe, do you think?

Scovill: It was a very strenuous training, yes. I have seen more recent television documentation of Marine Corps and Army and Navy training these days, and I think comparable, as far as strenuousness is concerned, to our experiences. For example, after we graduated from boot camp – on return from Iceland, which we eventually were shipped out to – we did further training at a horse race racing track on the California coast where they could no longer have large crowds because of the threat of possible bombing or shelling from Japanese aircraft or submarine warfare on the coast of California – and would not want to have a major tragedy with a hit with a large crowd of people at, say, a horse race – so that track was used as a training facility and the reference was made to that. In comparison, we made a twenty-two mile hike from that facility to our Camp Elliot campsite and the one that I went through was done at a record time, and our reward was blisters all over our feet. So, these were the trainings that we had. After boot camp experience and training, since I was by the numbers selected to be an artilleryman, which I really was grateful for, we trained on at that time the 90mm anti-aircraft weapons for a period at the Marine Corps base, which happened to be right near one of the very large aircraft manufacturing industries on the California coast. And not only would we be defending our base and the Navy base, which was adjacent to the U.S. Marine Corps base, but the aircraft center and the city of San Diego as well. However, that training soon ceased and when we were moved out into Camp Elliot, we began training on various artillery weapons. However, the marines at that time, budgetary-wise was on the end of the list. The army got priority. The navy and the air force always seemed to get priority over any weaponry to the Marine Corps, and we got what was left over. Hence, the term “raggedy-ass marines.” After further training there, we were part of the responsibility for the defense of the California coast. The Japanese submarines actually did manage to try to shell the oil fields near Long Beach, and it was feared that they would land parties to do sabotage. So the marines who were on the west coast at that time also served in defense of the country on the West coast. However, that was after our experience in Iceland, which was an eight month tour of duty in Iceland.

Mark: And when did you go there? It's before Pearl Harbor, I take it?

Scovill: We loaded onboard ships to go to what we had been informed by the scuttlebutt, the gossip root, was gonna be another training experience on the California coast, or on Catalina Island, where training was being done by landing marines and the methods that were used in those dates. However, we loaded up and we boarded ships at San Diego docks, and it took us fifteen days from San Diego via the canal then across, up to the North Carolina coast, where we landed temporarily with our ships, and during that was a very extreme experience. The ship refueled destroyers with fuel oil, and lightened the ship to the point that the ship that we were on listed to a point where we could almost walk on what was the walls of the interior of the ships. And when they would try to right the ship by reestablishing equilibrium, they would overload the tanks that they were pumping seawater into on that side, and then it would list to the other side worse than that list had been in the beginning. So we went like a bunch of drunken sailors down through the Panama Canal, and went through the canal where the tanks were all flushed and fresh water put in them, and the fuel oil was refueled and the ship again regained its equilibrium. So then we went up to the rest of the trip with the convoy. And why was convoy necessary? Because Germany's wolf packs at that time were causing great disasters off our East coast, and indeed, all the way down to South America, so it was necessary to be in convoys protected by our destroyers and other submarine warfare defenses. When we got into the Charleston harbor, we had to haul what's called "dennage" – it was pig iron – across the decks of four ships that we were tied up adjacent to, and store them in the lower part of the ships in order to prevent the possibility of becoming inadequately balanced during the trip across the Atlantic Ocean. From there, we went on up to Newfoundland, where we happened to tie up for a brief two or three day period before the full convoy was set for travel across the Atlantic through the German wolf packs. We landed in Reykjavik, Iceland on July 7, 1941. That's a long answer to your question of when and where, but that's the trip as it went. We landed in Reykjavik, Iceland on July 7, 1942 [1941]. That was 42 days out of San Diego.

Mark: And how long were you in Iceland?

Scovill: We were in Iceland from July 7, which was the midpoint of their summer, where we had 24-hour sunlight. We worked around the clock in groups of marines. That is, there were marines constantly at work unloading ships at the docks and building campsites and so on. Never-ending, throughout our entire stay in Iceland, we were actually better trained as dock men, unloading all these ships, than we were trained as marines. Although we placed -- I was with the artillery at that time -- we had 75mm pack howitzers. We had one battalion, the 4th Battalion, had twelve guns. At that time, I was with the 2nd Battalion of the artillery. And for each gun, we built 24 different positions on which we thought that we might be needed to defend various parts of the coastline of Iceland, and we camouflaged them with dummy guns so that if the Germans did any aerial photography, and they did, they would assume that we were indeed a vast force of people, where actually there were just a little over 4,000 of us as marines there in Iceland. Our sojourn in Iceland extended through the summer months, and into the fall at which time not only did we have continuous unloading of ships to do, but we had to build our own barracks, which were called Nissen huts. Here in this country we have

a different name for the half-barrel style of buildings that were constructed. These were made in England, called Nissen huts. And we built camps that were ultimately to be used by the army that when they moved in to prepare and protect the shipping routes to Europe and prepare for the war in Europe. These was another eye-opening experience for marines. We had only, for the unit I was with, one hammer, one saw, a pair of pliers, and a couple of screwdrivers, and that was all the carpentry tools we had. If there were nails involved, and there were, we took and found stones that would fit in the palm of our hands to pound the nails into place with. For forms, we used – the gasoline was being shipped over in five-gallon cans for the aircraft and so on – and these made convenient forms for making the pilings that these huts were set on. And on each one of those we place, J-bolts to anchor down the bottom parts of the huts that we were building. Every marine participated in this in some way or another. Because of the storms that occurred in Iceland, where winds were often greater than 100 miles per hour, they would blow the huts away. So we had to anchor each one in place with walls of rock and stones and whatever we could pile up against the buildings to hold ‘em down during those storms. In fact, as you will find by reading my book, one of our experiences – we unloaded a huge Navy cargo ship – and I say huge because I remember the holds as being large enough that, in my mind, you could lower an entire house down into the hold with the winches without having the house come anywhere near the sides of this hold. It was loaded full with lumber of all sizes and shapes, and the deck load was even greater than what was in the cargo holds. And the Marine Corps shifts went on twenty-four hours a day unloading these huge ships, and for all this lumber, we stacked it on top of a lava dome mountain. Iceland is a volcanic country, all formed out of lava from a rift in the ocean bottom at that point in the Atlantic Ocean. And the lava flows had formed a large dome in one place. Because it would drain in all directions, that was chosen as a good place to put all this lumber that was to be used for making not only camps in Iceland but later in Europe as well. We had stacked this for several days – I want to say weeks because it seemed that long to me, unloading this huge cargo ship – we stacked it and wired down every six rows of lumber with wire, in alternate direction which it was being stacked on these piles, all over the top of this huge dome. Well, just at that time, which was coming towards the fall, one of the storms that frequent Iceland occurred. Now, the reason for the frequent storms is that the gulfstream comes up through the Atlantic and dissipates in the vicinity of Iceland, whereas the Arctic currents come down from there, and these two streams of ocean water at very different temperatures creates ideal situations for huge, terrible storms. And they blew our pile of lumber – most of the stacks – all the way from this hill, this dome mountain, down to the sea, and we had to go on what was called “police duty,” – that is, picking up all the trash – carry it all back, and wire it all back on. And that was one extended hike. And in addition, we had to keep up all our responsibilities of guarding Iceland as well as our duties unloading ships at the docks and building camps for the army. This went on until the army finally started to come in, and they came in like a bunch of tourists. Their ships pulled up at the docks and they got off, and of course we were very, very, very happy to see ‘em. And they walked off their ships and loaded up in our trucks and we trucked them off to the camps where we had actually made their cots, and put coal in their huts, and everything else in preparing for the army’s occupation of Iceland. Finally, in March, we were relieved from our Iceland duty, because in December, as everyone knows, December 7th, of 1941 Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. And actually, I’m fortunate to have been – the reason I can give you this oral history – is because I had been in

Iceland rather than being somewhere in the Pacific at that time, where more than likely in the early parts of the Pacific war, I would have been subjected to the things that occurred on Wake, or the Philippines, or Guam or the other places where the United States had our bases at that time.

Mark: So, how about if you just describe to me, then how you got from Iceland to the Pacific – two very different parts of the world. Just sort of walk me through that process.

Scovill: When we were finally relieved of our Iceland responsibility, we loaded on troop ships, and wouldn't you know we no more than got loaded and the convoy was getting organized to return to the United States. This was at the peak of the German wolf pack submarine warfare period, and you couldn't get a ship unprotected anywhere without the Germans causing it to be a casualty of war. So, they were gathered in the deep fjords of Iceland and then a convoy of destroyers and submarine defense Navy equipment would convoy these groups of ships back and forth. As we were gathering in this fjord, a huge, terrible storm came up, and I recall seeing one of the ships, as the wind tore at the ships – the ships were under way with anchors down to hold their position in tight packed in this rather narrow fjord, so you were only a few miles wide and there wasn't much space for maneuvering – one of the ships was turned by the wind entirely around – it had both anchors down – and when it came time for us to pull out of there, I saw the sparks as they cut away the anchor chains in order to get the ship free from its anchors, which were wound up – the ship having been turned completely around in the fjord. We then made the trip back to the United States, and throughout the trip, the storm continued, and I was always prone to seasickness. And it was one of my most vivid memories of how bad seasickness can be. And finally, when we were just a day or two out of New York, the weather changed and the sun came out, and immediately I was hungry. I couldn't stand to eat any food because it would only come up immediately during the trip back across the Atlantic. So, it wasn't time for chow yet and I went down to the ship stores and decided to buy a little pack of peanuts – salted peanuts – it was one of my favorite things to buy at that time. I bought them, I went up on deck and ate them, much to my sorrow, because soon thereafter I was seasick again, and, boy, peanuts really *sting* when they come up and swat you on the nose. So, and they come up very, very [chuckles] violently when you're vomiting. So, it was one of the lessons to learn on the way back. We went directly into the harbor at New York, past the Statue of Liberty, and to docks where the ships were unloaded. We were given a fifteen day leave at that time to go – during that fifteen day period we had to cross the country on our own and we could go wherever we wanted, and whatever way we could obtain, but we had to report at Camp Elliot in California in fifteen days. And, so, we managed to get about a week at home in Madison – “we” being John Wasik (??) and myself – and we toured across the country by train, is the way we went. And we reported at our duty stations in San Diego at Camp Elliott at the end of the fifteen day period. This was one of the very few leaves that I had during my service with the Marine Corps. When we returned to Camp Elliot, our units were broken up, and once again it was a matter of standing up in rows – marines being organized in rows, counting off, and, “Numbers five to ten, you go with this unit,” and numbers ten to whatever go to another unit, so that was the way we were selected for whatever unit we were placed in. And I was, during that period of a few months, trained in several different artillery units. I always had been fortunate enough to be stuck in the artillery, whereas John got stuck into a

communications outfit and ended up in a different regiment from me, and from there on we parted throughout the rest of our Marine Corps tour of duty. We never met again. Johnny ultimately ended up with the 22nd Regiment, which fought on Eniwetok in the Pacific and ultimately on Guam, and John also experienced time in Guadalcanal as a part of one of their training bases at that time, which was long after the island had been secured. So, that's how – what the experience of getting back from Iceland to duty for the Pacific. After further training – and what we were called was cadres – the Marine Corps was being expanded at that time with more divisions, and the cadre was the basic formation. I was advanced to the rank of Sergeant then, and was eventually shipped out as M Battery, 4th Battalion, 10th Marines. 10th Marine Regiment was one of the regiments with the 2nd Marine Division. The 2nd Marine Division had been infantry units that served on Guadalcanal and its outlying islands – I should have said the outlying islands such as Florida, Tanambogo (??), and Guvatu (??), which were taken just hours – landings were made just hours before the 1st Marine Division was made on Guadalcanal. So actually, the 2nd Marine Division infantry units were the first assault troops to go into combat against the Japanese during World War II in the Pacific. Assault has to be taken for what it means. Yes, the Japanese had already involved marines who were in defensive units at Pearl Harbor, on the ships that were in Pearl Harbor, and at camps on islands of Oahu, Hawaii, and others – and on Wake Island and on Guam, and on the Philippines and elsewhere where many marines lost their lives so that we can be free. After my training was completed – again, at Camp Elliot, we were shipped out in a convoy of two ships – I should say, company of another ship. After we were convoyed out beyond the submarine menace – the Japanese submarine menace – area along the West coast, from there on for a couple of days or more, the other ship was with us, and it eventually went somewhere else and we were alone going across the great Pacific Ocean down to New Zealand, where the 2nd Marine Division was being organized for the ultimate combat. After Guadalcanal was taken and secure, the next islands that were involved were the Solomons chain of islands, and the Gilberts – where Tarawa occurred – and that was in November 20th of 1945.

Mark: And this is your first combat experience?

Scovill: I'm sorry, that's – yes, Tarawa, 1943. I'm sorry. The date I had incorrect there, in just stating numbers.

Mark: Why don't you just describe to me your "birth of fire," as they sometimes call it – your first combat experience – What's going through your head? What are your recollections?

Scovill: In that first action where I actually got bloodied – as far as Marine Corps terminology is concerned for having served in combat – I don't believe that they actually had expected that they would be landing the weapon that I was trained to use at that time, which was a four-inch weapon, which had a range of about eight miles at the extreme range, because the island was only two and a half miles long! However, anyone who reads anything, or has seen any documentation of the combat on Tarawa, will very quickly learn that the initial landing troops were slaughtered. We landed from the inside of the atoll where actually the defenses were weaker than on the outer ocean shorelines. But even then, the defense that the Japanese had set up was so formidable that Marines by the hundreds were killed by the various fire

that the Japanese were placing on us. Having to walk all the way from about 800 to 1000 yards – that's nearly a quarter of a mile – wading across these coral that's filled with pits and caves and craters from explosions, and filled with double-apron barbed wire – several rows of it – and all sorts of defense setups that the Japanese had placed, with no way to fire back. And they waded ashore – the 2nd Marine Regiment elements – and the 8th Marine Regiment elements, which were troops that I had been trained to support with our artillery, forward observation being with them. But, when the battle went on for the first day, all we could do was sit onboard ship and see the fires and the explosions that were taking place from our position on a ship that we were on, and knew that it was a terrible fight, and we were all anxious to get in there help, and there wasn't anything we could do. In fact, the communications were so poor in the beginning on Tarawa, that even what was going on on the island was a complete mystery to the commanding general, which was aboard one of the old time destroyers that had been salvaged out of Pearl Harbor. Then, eventually on, after a day and night had passed, my artillery survey unit was given the call to go ashore and do the survey for firing our weapons to help support the combat that was ongoing on Tarawa – because the marines had managed to hold on through the first night, and the first and second days -- and so we went ashore as a group. The survey methods that we had then were entirely wrong for making assault landings from the sea. We had a 100-foot steel tape that measure a baseline distance between – so that we could do triangulation using instruments to measure the angles and then from this basic triangulation we would get the range to the target that we had chosen – and ultimately when the guns were brought ashore, we could fire the weapon. This was done while we were being sniped at, and the experience was just amazing. We took ashore with us paper to do our calculations on, books that contained angles – the logarithms and cosines, of sines and cosines, and all the other mathematical means of doing the triangulation solutions – and we were at that time, the weapon, the old Springfield rifle, had been replaced with other weapons. I have carried a carbine, which was a good weapon up to about 200 yards to carry. In addition to my instrument that I had to carry, along with the paper and maps and other things that I had to carry – and pencils and so on to do our calculations with – and the men that were with me, that were a part of my survey team, that would measure the angles and pass the information on to me, and then I had a team of men we had trained to go through all these calculations to determine the initial firing information for the guns. Now, there were four guns in my firing battery. These guns had to be laid parallel. For artillery, the guns are laid parallel like on a ship so that your projectiles are all going on a parallel line toward the target. And your differences in elevation for each individual weapon, and for any deflection of angle between each of the weapons, would cause an erroneous result in where the various shells would explode, and your fire would be out of control. So the survey had to be accurate enough to have all of the explosions for the four guns in a confined area and we could then not only with the weapons, but with the time of travel of the projectile from the tube to the target, alter the timing so that we could have explosions that would, after penetration into the armor or soil that we were using as a target, or explosion above ground as an infantry weapon to spray 'em with shrapnel from the explosions. So, this would ordinarily take a couple of hours for us to do under the extreme conditions that we had. Then, as soon as we had the survey done, the instrument men had to serve to help bring the weapons ashore and carry the ammunition and our food and water and everything else that we needed to have ashore. So the first gun that was brought ashore was very fortunate an Amtrack (??) that had survived the landings – an Amtrack (??) being a

vehicle that could float on water, or travel on land, having caterpillar-like tracks that would be able to propel it through water or across the land – and they hooked up to the gun when the landing craft could go no further and pulled our number one gun ashore. But the rest of the weapons had to be manhandled by men with rope harnesses to get ‘em ashore for that first getting into position. And we had to manhandle them up out of the ocean across this very treacherous coral situation that we were landing across, and into position, and then fire our weapon as soon as it was in position and ready to fire. Then, by that time, the communications had improved somewhat, but the organization of the 2nd Marine Regiment and 8th Marine Regiment had been so decimated by the slaughtering that they took in making the initial landings that there was virtually no organization whatsoever other than every marine doing what he had to do. The Japanese, on the other hand, had defenses that were – each one almost bombproof from the largest weapon that you can imagine – and they would sit in there and fire on us with machine guns and weapons of every description as we were trying to counter their attacks, and it was a simple slaughter by a defense position. Attack by individual marines and groups of marines that slowly whittled away at the Jap defenders until we ultimately were able to get a organized line when the 6th Marine Regiment was brought ashore as a reserve, and was able to establish a line to have an actual combat line, shoulder to shoulder, across the island, which was less than a half a mile wide, so that you have man-to-man contact. So, that was the first thing. Now, by that time it was now going into the third day. The combat ended after 72 hours, the island was declared secure. But there were Japanese in all of these many bombproof shelters that had never been even scratched, and they were crawling out like ants out of an anthill. The odor – by this time this was almost situated exactly on the equator – the flesh decayed very rapidly. There were over 1,200 dead Marines, and over 5,000 Japanese troops that were ultimately killed on this island called Betio, and the Gilbert Island called Tarawa. The odor was overwhelming. It was like a burning garbage dump. If you’ve ever experienced the smell of burning hair – as the smoldering went on with the humans being cremated in an open fire, all those bodies cremated by their burning or by the sun’s – any body lying in the open would begin to boil – the fluids within the body. Within an hour or so – after a very short period of time, let’s say two, three hours – the only way we could tell a Marine from a Japanese was by the web gear that we were wearing, and by the armament that the man had. And of course the Marines who were fortunate enough to not have their dog tags blown away had that means of identification as well. But it was a very, very extreme situation to observe. We had every man who was physically able to work – had to assist in bearing the dead from the third day until the tenth day in organized parties. All the Japanese were loaded on parts of the corrugated sheet metal that they had for roofs for their – some of their various buildings – and with wires we dragged them to the nearest shell hole and rolled ‘em in. The Marines were carried to a cemetery area where they were identified and burial parties took care of the burial of the Marines. After we got a shell hole filled with Japanese bodies, we would call for the Seabees – had come ashore by that time, and had bulldozers and would bulldoze the sand over the decaying bodies. But this presented another hazard. There could be no water that was in any of the wells that was drinkable for *years* into the future because of the fact that the bodies were buried – these shell holes had water in them – they went right down into the water which had been the only source of fresh water for the island – was that which had floated as a bubble on top of the seawater that surrounded the island. So, this is the mental views. Then after we were given a couple of hours on a couple of occasions to tour the

island and see this carnage – and I’ve described it as well as I could in my book, What Did You Do, Grandpa?, and that chapter got tears [breaking down] as I tried to write it.
[recording stopped]

Scovill: Do you want to introduce a further introduction to start this off?

Mark: No, no. It’s good, it’s the same tape. It’s not a problem.

Scovill: Yeah. Alright. After Tarawa was declared secure, we were ordered to place the guns in positions that we could repel Japanese landing attempts if any were made – because we had knowledge that the Japanese navy base was on the Truk islands – and we anticipated and did receive bombing missions from the Marshall islands as well as the Truk islands, as well as islands that were further west of Tarawa. We were anticipating that there may be Japanese Navy attempts drawn out that could shell us and so on, and we wanted to be able to answer their fire with our guns if they actually did attack us. Fortunately, that never occurred, although we were bombed and strafed. When we finally were ordered to board ship for transportation – once again, the marines never know where they’re going, they’re just ordered to board ship, and on you go – and as it turned out, we were loaded aboard a troop ship, and our guns were placed on another troop ship, and we were shipped back to Hawaii where the 2nd Marine Division built Camp Tarawa on the island of Hawaii up between Mauna Loa and Mauna Kia in a ranch land that existed there at that time. Of course, this was all lava up there. We landed at the city of Hilo on Hawaii Island, which is now one of the famous ports for people that want to go see Kilauea, the most active volcanic that is on our country’s land in Hawaii – and tourists by the thousands go by there and pass through Hilo where we landed. And then we made the long trip across these lava flows to the camp that we again had to build, and there we trained for our next combat experiences. Replacements were shipped in and among us that now had some battle experience, we were again split up and sent out to other units, such as the 3rd, 4th, and 5th, and 6th Marine Divisions that were forming, or were needing replacements so that my instrument section that landed on Tarawa was pretty well – there were 13 of us then – that ended up with half a dozen of us that stayed together with the 4-M-10 gun battery. We trained in Hawaii on an artillery range that was part of the Parker Ranch area for the experiences in it was mountainous which we should have come to believe would be our experiences in further combat such as we had on Saipan or on Japan itself, and Iwo Jima as well. After our training there, we shipped out in May and after a couple of practice landings where there were also further mishaps, we were gathered into a convoy in Pearl Harbor and then sent out as convoys ending up first in the lagoons at Eniwetok. And then, when our convoy was grouped together, we were shipped out for Saipan. At this same time, Guam was going to be attacked by the 1st Marine Division, and other reinforcing elements such as John Wasick’s (??) 22nd Marine Regiment. But, when they were to go a week or two after we had landed on Saipan, but the landings on Saipan – not to our knowledge, we knew nothing of it – drew out the Jap fleet at which the navy battle of the Philippine Sea, which the airmen call the “Turkey Hunt,” occurred, and the Japanese remaining remnants of their aircraft carriers were ultimately destroyed as the Japanese came out to challenge us against our occupation of Saipan, which, throughout our combat on the island, we knew nothing about. Saipan is a much longer duration in story than Tinian – er, I mean, yes, Tinian as well – but then Tarawa. Saipan, we made the landings on June 16th of

1944. I landed with the 3rd wave of infantrymen with a group of five men. We had learned from Tarawa that we could not do surveys in that manner we had for Tarawa – so we went to a different type of artillery control where there was map grids set up and we had established before we made the landing the exact position in which the guns would be placed, and the exact location of the grid in which we were to get our initial shot out from which we could then move around as far as deploying our fire was concerned. Once we had the ranges and so on established, and actual experience, we could then defend ourselves with our weapons. However, throughout this time, as you could well expect, the Japanese had themselves well dug-in, all camouflaged – nothing was out of their range. We were rained with their shell fire for days and the artillery, of course was their prime target. Because if they could shell – and quiet our return fire – they then could launch infantry attacks against our infantry, and other attacks and hopefully overwhelm us. However, we were able to withstand their constant shelling and were able to establish our positions and eventually we – being the 2nd Marine Division and the 4th Marine Division, which landed from the Charan Kanoa, the sugar refining city on the coast of Saipan. As far as the southern tip of the island – this was the sector that was assigned to the 4th Marine Division. They had an artillery regiment, the same as the 2nd Marine Regiment of artillery, and they experienced even more severe battering than we did, and suffered huge losses among their artillerymen. My responsibility was to establish where the position that had been determined initially before we even made the landing for our number one gun, find a route to that position that was free of landmines or other potential risks, get back to the shore, and lead our number one gun into position. Now, each – there was a team of five of us – each of three of the men had a similar one for the various batteries of the 4th battalion – that is, M battery had four guns, K battery had four guns, and L battery had four guns. We were all 105 howitzers. Each regiment of the marines similarly had twelve guns. Weapons would be organized in fire by the division fire control center, which could fire then either the 75mm pack howitzers – of which there were two regiments, the 1st and 2nd Regiments – the 105s – which were the 3rd and 4th Regiments – which was a four-inch weapon, and there was at that time attached what was considered by the marines to be a lost group, a 5th Regiment, and they had what the Marine Corps's biggest, longest range weapon, the 155 Long Toms, which had a range up to twelve miles. These were called Long Toms because of the long barrel – it was a rifle, rather than the howitzers which we had. It had a range that exceeded ours by at least four miles. It could fire greater distances, but, of course, the greater the distance, the less the accuracy of the weapon. When the guns came ashore, it was responsibility of each one of the three of the five men to bring the number one gun for his battery ashore, whereas we had one officer among the five – he and the communications man were to report to the infantry regiment's command post in order to get their orders as to when we could come ashore with our weapons. So, our initial team, then, would beat it back – we went back to where the guns were to be landed near the pier by Charan Kanoa, and waited for the guns to come ashore. They did so – the first one being landed at about one o'clock. And I led M battery's number one gun prime mover vehicle, which is a great big truck that had tires that were about four feet in diameter, and it was loaded with ammunition and the gun crew. And I had chosen a route along the western side of an airstrip that the Japanese were building from Charan Kanoa towards Garapan for landing their fighter aircraft. It was not completed yet, and I found that there were no landmines along that side of the airstrip. Although the center of the airstrip looked good, I thought that I had better camouflage moving along that side, and would move up to an area

where there were pine trees that looked much like our southern pine, and the Wisconsin white pine trees that the Japanese had built near what was a gravel pit where they were taking the sand and soil to make this airstrip that they were building. This pine grove had trees with trunks about, at that time, three to four inches in diameter – maybe a few might have been five inches or slightly more in diameter – and the trees were from, well, twelve to fifteen feet high, mostly, although some of them were a little taller than that. When I got to the trees, I had the truck turned inland along side this gravel pit, and into the trees so that I was camouflaged in there, and the Japs never did actually see where we put our M battery number one gun, whereas the K battery and L battery men took their guns right straight down the middle of the Charan Kanoa landing strip, where they were under observation by the Japs all the way from the landing point to their position, and they paid dearly for that – having received much worse shellings than M battery did. So that in the official monograph records of Saipan, you will find the comment that the artillery was knocked out by the Japanese. [emphatically] *Not so.* Everyone but M battery was knocked out. The route that I had chosen, I believe, contributed to saving M battery from the horrible shelling that the others took, where they were actually knocked out of ability – K battery and L battery – the 1st and 2nd Battalions, the pack howitzers, were all shut down for periods of time by anti-battery fire from the Japanese artillery and mortars and everything else they could throw at us. So this went on – the shelling continued on for fully a week before we were only getting scattered – but in the meantime the 14th Regiment, which was with the 4th Marine Division, was also an artillery regiment and was receiving their fire – the Japanese fire – and they were shelled even more intensely than we, and had greater losses than we had - direct hits on weapons, and so on. And, of course, gun crews suffered dearly whenever a hit on their weapon occurred. But, the Japs had to enlarge their target area, because at the time then that the Jap Navy came out to challenge our occupation of Japan, the 27th Army Division was onboard ship to be a reserve unit in case needed. However, to get the men on the troop ships, out of harm's way from the Japs' Navy, the decision was made by the men in control of the combat to land the 27th Marine Division, and they then began coming ashore, and they had another battalion of artillery as well, as long as, in addition to other 155 – that's a 6-inch diameter weapon – howitzers and artillery for their army division – and they were landed to get them out of harm's way onboard ship. And then, from there on, the Japs' target expanded to the point that they had to spread their fire, and we were beginning to get relief from the constant shelling that we were receiving. In the meantime, we went back and forth between – we, the instrument section personnel – was moved from forward observers to back of the guns and trading in order that you'd have three or four days as a forward observer, and three or four days at the guns. The guns was always considered worse than the infantrymen – the infantrymen were happy to be in the infantry because they didn't get the anti-combat fire from the Japanese that the artillery received. They had – actually it was quiet up at the front lines often, whereas the guns was a constant roar. Deafening. And this went on until we finally got a stranglehold all the way across the island and took the mountain – Mount Tapotchuan – on Saipan, and was able then to get organized into a front line with the army unit – 27th Division – sandwiched between the two marine divisions. We then advanced northward, and by July 9, the island was declared secure. However, in the meantime there was what was called the worst banzai attack of the Pacific warfare – occurred and hit the artillery battery next to M battery with some 2 to 4,000 Japanese coming at us with nothing more than sticks and rifles and machine guns – and they did have a couple of tanks and other

weapons – and they moved up to where the 3rd Battalion, 10th Marine Batteries I and G were cutting the fuses to a fraction of a second to have the weapons projectile explode at almost the instant it left the bore of the tube to combat the Japanese that were overwhelming ‘em, and with bayonets and sabres and everything that they had. And we in M battery – our guns were firing on targets where they were organizing and where the other infantry units were moving ahead toward the end of the island – and we in the instrument section and others who could be spared from the guns were organized into patrols and going out in front of our guns to be sure that none of the Japanese from the banzai were able to survive to the point where they were actually attacking our men in our gun positions. This banzai was over in a day and the army made a body count – and it was in the thousands of Japanese that were killed – and there were more than 300 dead Japanese stacked up in front of the battery of the 3rd Battalion, 10th Marine Regiment – which held the line. They did not pass beyond us – although a couple of tanks did penetrate through their defense and they did have to abandon the weapons after making them inoperative and taking up the positions of the infantrymen to combat the Japanese after they could no longer occupy their gun positions. From there on, we set our guns to fire on a small island in Tanapag Harbor that was hardly more than a football field in length, and just about the same as a football field in width – and fired on that island for the infantry units to land and take it. Then, two weeks later we went to Tinian. On Tinian, I made a similar landing to that, except that I was not called on to land until the second day, and take our guns into position. Tinian landing is called “perfect” by the planners, however, when you say “perfect,” in war the lost of *a* individual, in my mind, is not perfect. There were more than 300 marines killed on Tinian. The marines killed on Saipan exceeded 4,000 men. There were more than 30,000 Japanese that were killed on Saipan, and more than 9,000 on Tinian. And these are not what you could define as perfect, in my opinion. The reason for the thinking of the higher echelon officers that it was perfect was because we, so-called, in quotes, “snuck in the back door” on the far east coast. Only about four or five miles from the pier at Charan Kanoa, which is actually the distance between the two islands was only three miles, and these two beaches were only a few yards in width – 75 to 80 yards in width. And you were gonna land an entire division of 22 or more thousand marines on these two very narrow beaches, and then immediately follow up the next day – the 4th Division was to take the assault, and the 2nd to follow on the next day. And we succeeded in doing that on these two narrow beaches by ingenuity and so on. I rode ashore from the ship on which I was loaded into what we know now as “ducks.” They are a wheeled amphibious vehicle that can go in both water and on land. And we rode ashore and nothing was allowed to stop on these beaches because of the funneling of all the masses of equipment we needed to get ashore through this narrow beach. All the way on this duck to the position where our guns were to be placed. We didn’t even – were not even fired on. The Japanese were all on the other end because of a ruse we had set up, where they thought we were going to land at the only landing beaches, which was at Tinian Town, on the other end of the island. So, that’s where they’d set up all their defenses, and they, on the first night had to organize troops if they were going to try to throw us back into the sea – which they did try to do – and they found that by the time they got their men to the end of the island that we had landed on, that we were well set up and defended with double-apron barbed wire and their style of barriers and they were slaughtered. There were 6 tanks with them, and our infantry threw off their attack in the night and they were not able to throw us back then. And the next day, I landed. We surveyed in, we brought in our artillery for the 10th Marine

Regiment - and the 14th Marine Regiment was in the 1st and 2nd Marine pack howitzer battalions of the 10th Regiment had gone ashore with the 4th Marine Division to give them immediate artillery support for a short range, augmenting their own artillery. But the bigger weapons that I was with did not get ashore until another day later. Then, we did what was a stand-up walk – shoulder to shoulder with the infantry – from one side of the island with the 2nd Marine Division on the left and the 4th Marine Division on the right. We walked from one end of the island to the other, and the Japanese defenders were pushed back until they were all crowded into one corner at the end where they made their last stand, and fought us viciously until we were ultimately able to kill them all off except for the civilians which responded to our calls – “our” being the translators that had loudspeakers mounted on jeeps – and implored them to come out and surrender – that we’d give them food and water and protection, which we did. So, Tinian was over in ten days. From there, then we were shipped back to Saipan, and we made a camp where we were to train for the landings on the Japanese islands proper. However, in between there was Iwo Jima and Okinawa. 2nd Marine Division troops were landed on Okinawa. Men from my initial surveying team had been assigned to the 6th and 3rd Regiment divisions of the Marines, which, along with another Marine division took Iwo Jima, and the survivors were very, very few. I don’t know if the men that were transferred out of my unit after Tarawa actually survived these landings.

Mark: Because you went back to the U.S.

Scovill: After we built our camp, and we trained – by that time, I had 28 months straight in the Pacific, and the eight month – [tape ends] – overseas time in Iceland, they were rotating troops. Men from the army could be rotated back to the states for what was called “rest and recuperation,” – R&R – after a two-year overseas experience, and 22 points – which I had more than 105 points. I had received the Silver Star, the third highest medal that can be awarded to a marine. I was actually cited for the Navy Cross, but since I had not been wounded in the activity, my citation was downgraded to a Silver Star, and I would rather have that and not have been wounded than to get the Navy Cross and perhaps lose a limb. Marines could have one higher award, and that was the Medal of Honor. And, no, thank you, I don’t want it. A dead marine could not carry home his own medal in case of the Medal of Honor. There were a few who – marines who actually lived and have the Medal of Honor. [emotionally] Those men are God’s miracles. I was shipped back to the United States on a Class B hospital ship which had, apparently, some urgent mission, because we went at top speed of that ship after having passed Eniwetok island, alone with no convoy whatsoever – never even stopped anywhere else until we got to the Golden Gate Bridge. And I was landed early the next – the year of 1945 at San Francisco’s Treasure Island, and from there was shipped by train down to San Diego, where we were given options during the six-month period that we were to have as to what duty we preferred. Of course, I had selected the Great Lakes Naval Training Center as one option, so I could be home – close to home – and maybe go home on weekends. As another option, I chose San Francisco because I was hoping, and had fallen in love with a California native woman, which never panned out for me. She lived in San Francisco, and I had tried to get, as an option, duty [unintelligible] various marine stations in San Diego. Or as an alternative, a engineering unit at other marine stations further down the coast past Los Angeles – south of Los Angeles but north of San Diego. However, I got none of my choices, which was typical for the Marine Corps, and ended up with a guard

battalion during that six months period. And thanks be to God, the atom bomb came from the very place, the very landing field the Enola Gay took off where I had set up our gun on [unintelligible]. So, my suffering from the disease and insects and stuff that we had during our combat on Saipan – dysentery and disease and rot and fungus and mosquitoes and flies until they were just beyond human imagination and tolerance – was experienced and it was all paid off by the Enola Gay dropping the atomic bombs and ending the war. Otherwise, by the time my six months rest and recuperation was over with, I was to be shipped back and would have made landings on Japan islands proper, and no doubt would not have lived.

Mark: But, fortunately the war did end. I just have a few questions about your post-war experiences.

Scovill: Oh, after the war, the country had generously set up the G.I. Bill of Rights and we – I took advantage of that to complete my university education at University of Wisconsin. After I was discharged, because I was a medal holder and had far more points than was needed, I was discharged within a week or two after the war was ended, and I decided just for fun to hitchhike home. And I hitchhiked home from California – and I describe in my book, What Did You Do, Grandpa?, that experience. Then I went back to the University of Wisconsin and I completed my education. [emotionally] During that education I met my wife – the girl that was to become my wife. [more emotionally] And had a romance with her, and we enjoyed fifty years together before she died this year. [audible weeping] [tape was stopped]

Mark: I've got one question about the life on campus, and the G.I. Bill. You were in sort of an interesting position in that you went to school before the war at the U.W., and then after the war. So, I'm sort of interested to know if there were any differences.

Scovill: Yes. Actually, when I was discharged, I was thinking about being an architect, and I went up to California Institute of Technology and checked out what they had. But they had a number of courses that would require up to six more years to eight years for me to complete, and they would not honor all of my freshman credits from the University of Wisconsin. And then I checked out UCLA and the University of Southern California, and had similar problems. Also, at that initial time, the G.I. Bill would allow you only \$50 a month, and that was inadequate amount of money to find living quarters and food to live on for a month's period of time, although all your books and the tuition and everything else was paid for. Still, it was not enough amount to pay your actual living expenses. At the University of Wisconsin, I had to start my sophomore year over again. I had my textbooks that had just been put in boxes on the half-day we had to resolve our – “we” being John Wasick (??) and I – had to resolve our civilian affairs before we went into the Marine Corps. And I read things such as my mathematics calculus book from cover to cover, and the discipline that I had learned in the Marine Corps had trained me adequately [eloquently?] for being able to assume a study program that I could adhere to in a manner that before the marine experience would not have been possible. So, my grades improved through my sophomore, junior, and senior year, and I was able to drag my poor freshman records out of the mud and I managed to graduate from the University of Wisconsin in mid-semester in the January class being in the upper third of the graduation class of that year. So, immediately thereafter, I sought work, and took employment at our famous Madison industry, Oscar-Meyer and Company, as a draftsman

and engineer in their group. I had originally had aspirations to be a civil engineer, but during the war I had seen all the world I wanted to see, and decided I wanted to set my roots down and it seemed to me that mechanical engineering offered a better opportunity to do so, such as taking a job at, let's say a powerhouse or a machine tooler or other machinery industry work, such as was available in Milwaukee and the former Gisholt Machine Company here in Madison and elsewhere. But I found employment at Oscar-Meyer and Company, and began that employment with a degree, five years of experience in the war, a veteran, at \$55 per week – and was happy because that was more than double what the G.I. Bill was paying me – and my wife and I were very happy. We went on – we had four children – all grew up to be wonderful children – are now parents themselves. One lives in Arizona now – she has an education with a degree in Hydrogeology here at the University of Wisconsin, and a Master's degree in Hydrogeology work at the University of Arizona, and took up employment there in Tuscon area. Our oldest daughter has a degree in Teaching and a degree in Occupational Therapy, both degrees from the University of Wisconsin. Our youngest daughter is a licensed practical nurse, having attended and completed courses at the Madison Area Technical College here in Madison. Our son is a heavy machinery operator, and has had many years of experience. He enlisted in the Marine Corps, but because of eczema, which was beyond the acceptability for Marine Corps eligibility, was discharged from the Marines before Vietnam and Korea, and much to my pleasure he did not have to serve in those. He currently works for the state of Wisconsin now, and is at a maintenance and grounds group as a heavy machinery operator working for the division of the State at the University of Wisconsin.

Mark: That's about it. All the questions I have. Anything you'd like to add, or –

Scovill: No, I thank you very much for this opportunity, and hope that someone who may hear this in the future will realize that war is an extreme waste – which I have mentioned in my book, my opinion of that. It's a waste of the financial treasures of nations, fighting their neighbors over things that end up to become a burden to themselves in the future if they should win their battles. And it's a waste of material and resources and young men and blood and bodies and souls beyond comprehension – and should not be a means of our resolving differences in nations. If there's anything that we can do to get us to collaborate as nations and work together and keep our resources intact for future generations to have and utilize, this is the goal that we should put forth, and it cannot be obtained through warfare, in my opinion.

Mark: Very well said. Thanks. Thanks for coming in.

[End of recording]