

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
NORRIS TIBBETTS
Officer, Army, 34th Infantry Regiment, World War II.
1994 & 1995

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Tibbetts, Norris, (b. 1921). Oral History Interview, 1994-1995.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 105 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 105 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract

Tibbetts, born in Boston (Massachusetts), discusses his military service with the 87th Mountain Infantry Division. Tibbetts mentions the Depression, his stance as a conscientious objector prior to 1941, and the attack on Pearl Harbor. He touches upon his sociology studies at Harvard University, and discusses at length his service during World War II, in the 87th Mountain Infantry Regiment, which consisted of “Ski Troopers” and “Mule Skinners.” In 1942 Tibbetts left Harvard and reported for active duty in Fort Lewis, (Washington). He talks about training at various camps such as Fort Benning (Georgia), Camp Roberts (California), Fort Dix (New Jersey), Camp Hale (Colorado), and Fort Ord (California). He explains the merging of the 85th, 86th and 87th Mountain Infantry Regiments into the 10th division. Tibbetts tells of the Aleutians campaigns at Attu, Adak, and Kiska. He recalls that he applied for officers candidate school in 1944 and went to Fort Benning to become a 2nd lieutenant of infantry and at one point turned down an offer for a job with McArthur’s headquarters because he wanted to “fight fascism.” Tibbetts also discusses what he knows about the loosely formed Americal Division. He touches upon his experiences in New Guinea, and Subic Bay, and goes into detail regarding his time at Mindoro, and Mindanao in the Philippines where he became the Platoon Leader of B Company of the 34th Infantry Regiment. While explaining the Little Battle of the Lighthouse in Subic Bay, he illustrates soldiers’ preparedness by stating; “All of a sudden the peace of the rain forest will be shattered by machine gun fire. Nothing can prepare you for it.” He talks about traversing the Cotobato River, the Bataan Peninsula and the Zig Zag Pass Battle, illustrates banzai attacks by the Japanese, and discusses the usefulness of taking prisoners and the difficulties associated with Japanese prisoners in particular, as well as inter-unit rivalry in claiming the prisoners. He also describes the Moros at length, and their combat tactics as well as their religious observations. Tibbetts discusses experiencing painful shin splints, malaria, dengue fever, and developing rotten feet from the wet terrain. Tibbetts refers to the communications devices they used; including the 536 radio, and the crank-sound-powered-telephone. He describes having to improvise tactics such as firing mortars without base plates and tripods. Tibbetts summarizes speeches by President Eisenhower and how they empowered the troops. This leads Tibbetts to discuss the concepts of AOE (Accumulation of Everything) and FUO (Fever of Unknown Origin), to describe how the troops were affected by warfare. Sometimes, they ran out of water and Tibbetts explains having to make do with pineapple juice. He discusses how replacements fit in with the rest of the unit, and how they looked clean and refreshed while the men who had been there awhile were yellow from Atabrin and wore faded fatigues. Tibbetts reveals the definition of the term “Chicken Shit” by describing the enforcement of petty military

regulations, as well as discipline for violating “Chicken Shit” responsibilities and engaging in other reprimand. He recalls that Roosevelt died while he was on his way to Mindanao, and hearing about the bombs being dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. After the bombs, Tibbetts remembers leaflets being dropped and handed out to the Japanese to let them know the war was over. After the bombs, Tibbetts relates that he went to Shikoku Island, to the Town of Matsuyama. He reviews his work after the war in with textile workers’ unions and his arrival in Wisconsin to become a staff member of the University of Wisconsin School for Workers. He reveals his involvement with the American Veterans Committee (AVC) and speaks about his feelings regarding the Vietnam War and his participation in helping organize the group Veterans for Peace, then becoming disillusioned with the tactics and beliefs of protesters who were not veterans. He mentions that after the war, veteran affinity for each other is important to him, and he feels that he should stand by the soldiers he knew and encourages correspondence. Tibbetts discusses a letter he wrote to the local paper suggesting that we bomb the Vietnamese with refrigerators because they needed cold storage and food. He explains that his background in union work led him to think of Ho Chi Minh as a nationalist with a strong socialist bend. Tibbetts identifies the contents of over 40 photographs he donated. These include soldiers, geography, battle and rest areas, military bases, equipment for the ski troops, Japanese weapons, as well as photos of civilians he met in various places, such as a representative of Chiang Kai-Shek.

Biographical Sketch

Norris Tibbetts (b. 1921) was born in Boston, Massachusetts and grew up in Chicago, Illinois. He volunteered for the army during World War II, and served in the 34th Infantry Regiment. Upon returning to the United States, Tibbetts was a union representative in Virginia and South Carolina, moving to Madison, Wisconsin in the 1950s to teach at the University of Wisconsin School for Workers.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1994-1995

Transcribed by Joanna D. Glen, WDVA staff, 1997 and Christina M. Ballard, 2008.

Transcription edited by Christina M. Ballard, 2008.

Interview Transcript:

Today's date is November 21, 1994. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum. I'm doing an oral history interview with Mr. Norris Tibbetts, currently of Madison, a World War II veteran.

Mark: Good morning, Mr. Tibbetts.

Tibbetts: How do you do?

Mark: I'm fine. Yourself?

Tibbetts: Very well.

Mark: I suppose the place to start is at the top here, so perhaps you can tell me a little bit about where you were born, your upbringing, do you remember anything about the roaring 20's for example, or Great Depression. I see you were born in Boston?

Tibbetts: Born in Boston, 1921. My family was living in a town called Greenwich (pronounced Green which) in upper New York State at the time. My father was a Baptist minister, spent a couple of years there (formative years) then Chicago, Illinois, south side, grammar school, high school, how far do you want to go with this question?

Mark: Do you remember the Depression at all?

Tibbetts: I remember the Depression quite well and men standing in front of doorways, coming out of basement laundries in the evenings on 55th Street, guaranteeing themselves a place so they could survive the winter's cold. My father being a minister, many men unemployed came by to seek help, which was always forthcoming, mow the lawn, shovel the walk, you get a free meal, even if the lawn was mowed yesterday and the walk was quite clear - the theory being to do a little something for your food. At the end of the Roosevelt Administration I can recall that last part of grammar school and through high school.

Mark: When did you finish high school?

Tibbetts: '38.

Mark: I see when the war started you were a student?

Tibbetts: In college.

Mark: Where were you going to school?

Tibbetts: Harvard University.

Mark: What were you studying?

Tibbetts: Sociology. Because I knew we would be involved in the war and this seemed as general a subject as you could find. Take up whatever you wanted to take up when and if you survived the war.

Mark: Do you recall when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

Tibbetts: Oh yeah.

Mark: You were in college by this time?

Tibbetts: Yes, indeed.

Mark: Perhaps you could, if you recall where you were when you heard? That's kind of a cliché I know but—

Tibbetts: I think I was in the dining room of the house I lived in, in Cambridge, but I can't, I'm not sure whether I was reading headlines or hearing radio activity.

Mark: So before Pearl Harbor you were convinced that we were going to be in World War II?

Tibbetts: Pretty much so, in fact, I was attracted during those years to conscientious objector position prior to maybe 1940-41 on the theory that my dad had been through the first one and that didn't seem to prove much so why re-enter this thing, there must be another way. I changed my mind however.

Mark: What changed your mind? Anything in particular?

Tibbetts: Well, the thought that since most of the world was involved in this affair, you wouldn't be able to talk to anybody when you came out if you hadn't shared in the general uproar. If you share in the uproar you can speak with some authority as a participant.

Mark: So, when did you join the service?

Tibbetts: Enlisted shortly after Pearl Harbor in something that was called the 87th Mountain Infantry Battalion, Separate Reinforced, commonly called the Ski Troops because I was interested in skiing and I had the theory that if you were going to get shot anyhow, you might as well enjoy the training. But it took a while for the Army to accept the idea of a special unit of this sort and of the kinds of people who would be involved in the unit and I didn't get the

opportunity to be sworn in until summer of 1942.

Mark: I'm interested in the actual induction process. You were in Cambridge at the time?

Tibbetts: Well, I signed up by post card and letter to this sort of civilian group that was trying to get a special mountain unit organized – fight the Germans in Norway – that sort of thing. But I guess the Army, I seem to remember eagles and stuff showing up on correspondence, “Yes, you are hereby accepted in, and so forth and so on and you will be called and so on, but nothing happened until the summer of ‘42 when I was called to swear in.

Mark: You were in Chicago?

Tibbetts: No, I was in Vermont. So I'm a Vermont veteran.

Mark: Where did you go for basic training then?

Tibbetts: Interesting, not to a – whatever you call them, the big camps, like Camp Roberts out on the west coast and so on, reception center, so forth. They treated this battalion which was now a regiment, as a regular Army unit and it was a weird mixture of Dartmouth skiers and regular Army noncommissioned officers. When I joined the unit out west in Tacoma, Ft. Lewis, it was the unit that trained me. So I had a corporal who was in charge of the three or four of us in that company and in the mornings we went through the usual close order drill in handling weapons and in the afternoons we went out and played with the big boys – those who had been there a little longer. It was regular Army the way they did it in John Wayne movie.

Mark: This was your basic training?

Tibbetts: Yeah.

Mark: How long did that last?

Tibbetts: Till I made private first class – six weeks or so. It sort of faded away, you were just— no more that— you were now in the unit and doing everything.

Mark: Then you went to Camp Hale.

Tibbetts: Nope. Then we had maneuvers down in Jolon, California, Hunter-Liggett Military Reservation.

Mark: Where's that?

Tibbetts: King City sort of area.

Mark: North, South?

Tibbetts: Central, I think but close range between us and the ocean. Hunter-Liggett Military Reservation is an old time place. It was near the Hearst Estate [Famous Publishing Mogul]. We were a regiment by then and there was a unit, as I remember, of Filipino troops and we maneuvered in the mountains against, or with these people and lived in tents in the valley.

Mark: This was supposed to be mountain training? Sort of specialized maneuvers that you would have been involved in?

Tibbetts: Yeah, well there were hills, but no snow. Get your legs under you, you're going to learn how to operate as a squadron, platoon, company, battalion.

Mark: I'm interested in the idea of who was in this ski troop unit. You mentioned Dartmouth skiers and regular Army, how did they go about recruiting people for this unit specifically and maybe you could reiterate a little bit more about how you got interested and involved with this unit. Were they recruiting in the Ivy League schools for example?

Tibbetts: I think they were recruiting anywhere there were skiers. Among what are known as timber cruisers up in New England and the far west; people who had experience in the woods, living fairly independently, who could climb hills and preferably had had some experience on snow shoes and skis.

I had had a rather minimal experience on skis, but it looked like fun. They also had mules for handling baggage and so forth, ultimately to handle pack Howitzers so they went south to get mule skimmers and they were part of the unit and then they needed noncommissioned officers since Dartmouth students don't know beans about military service and in our unit at least, they either went for early, early draftees who had worked up to corporal and sergeant or regular Army guys who were inveigled into joining this peculiar unit. I think it was the only unit in the Army that had a glee club. A real mix, a very interesting mix and interesting to see the reaction of college types to military life.

Mark: You were one yourself.

Tibbetts: Yeah!

Mark: What did you think?

Tibbetts: Well, you join up in this great crusade to fight fascism and shoot down the Japanese Empire and you end up being detained for the weekend because your bed wasn't properly made. So you think, "You joined for *this*? After all, life

is real we should be out learning to do our thing and here we are in the kitchen!” But, it worked both ways, the regular Army guys who were quite ashamed, I think, to be dealing with this bunch of weird people, found out that they were, the folks human and vice versa and unit solidarity was it. I remember fondly these regular Army or semi-regular Army NCOs [noncommissioned officers] that had to whip the college boys into shape. But mixed with the college boys were these southern mule skinnners and more and more just people who were perhaps a little bit unhappy with life in another unit who volunteered for transfer. So it got more and more mixed up and fewer and fewer percentage of college types. Then they made two more regiments which were anybody they could put their hands on. Guys who had no interest whatsoever in the mountains or anything like that ended up in what became a mountain division – the 10th Division which is now in, down in 80th.

Mark: Yeah, yeah, I think they are. That’s interesting. I was going to ask you how all these people from diverse groups got along. Fairly well I take it.

Tibbetts: Sure. Action can be a great leveler too.

Mark: You mean combat action.

Tibbetts: Combat action.

Mark: We’ll come to that. Whatever happened to the 87th?

Tibbetts: Stayed as a Regiment through the war and on, and it became part of the 10th Division. 85th, and 86th were the new units and 87th was the original unit. Started as a battalion, made a regiment. Went up to the Aleutians campaign and during that interval they were forming the two other regiments out of a few skier types who had been left out and anybody else. We came back and felt we were now real Army and the Unit _____(?), the 87th was supplemented by noncoms from the 85th and the 86th – which I think was a *bad* mistake.

Mark: Why was that?

Tibbetts: They’d been together for quite a while and they took noncoms from the experienced unit and put them into the other units, _____(?) type thing and brought what we felt were sort of candy-ass noncoms from the 85th and 86th to take their place with us experienced guys, so you’re a private first class, you’re losing people to the new units, you think “Well, we’re going to become corporals and sergeants”, but not at all. You stay a private first class and they bring these people in as squad leaders and platoon sergeants. It was not a good thing to do and the unit was not happy with it.

Mark: I see. So when did you and your unit go to the Aleutians? This had to be fairly early then?

Tibbetts: Yeah. The Japanese went in there at the same time as Midway to draw off naval forces they hoped to draw naval forces up to the Aleutians, but they didn't, not much. So they went in and occupied Attu and Kiska, as you no doubt know, and bombed Dutch Harbor and it looked bad, worked your way down the chain on down Alaska. They were within bombing range of the Boeing plant in Seattle, maybe only one way, but gee whiz. So, let's go get them out of there and I think the Attu Campaign was about May of '43 and that was a couple of thousand Japanese there with a _____(??) division. Then there were going to be five times that many on Kiska – gonna be bad. So in the murk up there, the regiment, the 87th Mountain and I don't know who else, went in to take on the ten thousand Japanese on Kiska who had departed. First time they had not held on to the last soldier. So we shot each other.

Mark: I'll come back to that. It's interesting. I'm interested in the trip up to the battlefield there. You were in California? Or you were in Camp Hale at this time?

Tibbetts: Well, we had a winter, we'd been in Hunter-Liggett, we had a winter in mountain and _____(??) warfare training from about December to early spring in Hale which had just been built, and was just for the 87th – no other regiments. Then we went to Ft. Ord for amphibious training and had some weeks there in a delightful climate, climbing up and down cargo mats and going out to sea on the APAs, Army Personnel Attack Boats, going over the side and LCBPs [could not locate acronym meaning], storming ashore in Monterey and startling housewives and others. Buying newspapers from little boys who came among the ranks and then we'd get back in the boat and make a landing down at Carmel and so on. Then off we go. We went to San Diego for a couple of days, headed west in a task force, by boat, APA, Army Personnel Attack, and all sorts of Naval support for what was viewed as a horrible confrontation in the Aleutians where nobody could see anybody and the Air Force couldn't do you much good, on the way to Japan, because if they could come down the chain to the US, we could go up the chain. You're not far from the northern islands, once you're way out there at Attu, and perhaps move into Japan in the not too distant future from the north. It was a real thought – bridge to victory - somebody wrote a book called *Bridge to Victory*. But you couldn't see –

Mark: So you went from San Diego right up to Attu then.

Tibbetts: No, stopped at Dutch Harbor, staged at Adak if you will, just to see what tundra feels like and how exposed you can be when the fog lifts and what it's like, and then from Adak on to the boats and very minimal type landings

because of the terrain, a couple of boats at a time would be disastrous, but you have to do it, go into where you could to land on Kiska.

Mark: Environmentally, it was tundra you said?

Tibbetts: Yeah.

Mark: And foggy, you couldn't see?

Tibbetts: There were times when you could see, embarrassingly. You're in the fog, you think you're protected, the fog lifts and you are there to be seen like a giant slanted field to anybody up in the fog and start banging away and you have very little protection.

Mark: Perhaps you could describe landing on the island and your first combat experience.

Tibbetts: They're all the same. In the troop compartment and you lie there and with a stick you could touch maybe, we used to count, 36 other bunks, and it's canvas and you have this pipe around it and its about 2:30 in the morning and you are going to be called for your final meal, stand in line, wait for that. "All troops go to your boat stations, go to your boat station" [indicating orders], learn how to go over the side, pitch dark, how to handle the cargo net. You got everything on your back, go down the cargo net, boat's heaving up and down, LCVP [Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel]. Get yourself into the boat and then start circling six boats to the wave and you circle and everybody gets seasick, not everybody, and it's still pitch dark and the fog and the time comes maybe it's at 0630, landing, and you start in but it turns out you can't get all the boats in because of rocks, so you pass the destroyer that was always there kind of guiding things with its five inch guns battle down to the beach and down goes the ramp and out you come.

Mark: And what's there?

Tibbetts: You never know. It's like driving a truck up to the front lines and saying "Everybody out." So you don't know whether you're going to get shelled or attacked or whether they're up in the mountains. So you do what you had been trained to do. You go up the beach and you have your notes from what you were told, don't wait for any wounded, they'll be looked after afterwards, your job is to get in there and form your, in this case, platoon in the attack and start going, which is what we did.

Mark: Was there resistance on the beach?

Tibbetts: There was not. There again, you have to assume there will be resistance which is what makes the night before always chancy.

Mark: So when you landed there you formed up in your platoon?

Tibbetts: I think of this as a platoon action because that's what I was in. If I'd been an officer at the time I would have had more knowledge of unit deployment, but our job was to go up to something called Russian Ridge I think, because Japanese had difficulty with R's so everything had Russian Ridge, Prussian Ridge, all this on the theory that if they captured radios or got into the phone lines, you could tell if they were Japanese. We had seen photos, such as they were, of the area and it was quite well done. We had a mock-up on the boat and here's where you are going to go and your objective is up here and you're to get there as best you can and hold it against counter-attack and so on and we will have naval gun support and we'll have some B38's up there to come in and spray for bombs as the case may be. So they conveyed the attack information very well to the smallest unit. You knew what was what, but once you got the grass under your feet, it looks different. That's what we did, went up Russian Ridge, and prepared for a horrible counter-attack.

Mark: Which eventually came.

Tibbetts: No. It didn't. This was a – I don't know how familiar you are with that.

Mark: This battle, I'm not terribly familiar with it at all.

Tibbetts: It really wasn't a battle. But Attu had been a very difficult campaign it was about 21 days and that had been passed down to the troops too as what problems had been there, partly foot-gear because you're wet all the time and the Japanese had played it very cleverly, they were good soldiers and I think we took about a couple of thousand dead in that campaign and all the Japanese except about 30 were killed. It was found, as it had been found in the South Pacific that you can't really take prisoners because they booby-trap themselves or they fire the last shot. There had been a banzai counter-attack by the Japanese which had busted through the lines and caught a lot of people in their sleeping bags and so on in a sort of mass suicide with hand-held grenades and sort of bulldozer burials and all of this was still hot I was right down the chain. So that's what we expected, but instead of 2,000 Japanese there were going to be 10,000 dug in post artillery, also wire, all that stuff, mines, and when there was no defense on the beach, well, that was nice, there had been no defense on the beach at Attu either. The Japanese had pulled up and started potting at you when you were out where they could see you. We even got up this ridge, which was maybe a couple of miles inland and up 2 to 3,000 feet, dug in, still no Japanese. They were there though, I'm sure of it. So anything that moved, the whole theory to the Pacific war was Japanese, but some people didn't really believe that and units bumped into each other in the murk, fog – there they are and started firing and I don't know how many were killed, maybe a dozen or so. So it was really two or three days when all this

uproar and fog, before anybody concluded that “My God! The Japanese have pulled out.” Now how could they, because the naval forces were around there and intercept them and so on, but they had. It was further complicated by dugouts where food still seemed to be in preparation. Clothing was around and weapons in place. Nobody could believe it. Just had Tarawa was _____(??). So there was a lot of unit conflict and pretty soon the sun came out and no Japanese. Kind of an anticlimax.

Mark: I would say, strange. I’m not familiar with that much, with that campaign all that much, that’s kind of an obscure one.

Tibbetts: So then we went around the Regiment. Looking at what had been in store for us, which is horrifying, how in hell we would have gotten on shore for example, all these dug in machine guns at various beaches, not many beaches, and wire and mines and artillery in place and mortar in place. And we out-posted the island which was kind of fun – living in Japanese dugouts, things dug into the hill the way the Aleuts did it, and with a radio on the theory the Japanese were going to come back. It was early in the war, why not? Pull out and come back and take the Aleutians and go on down to Seattle so we were out there to give out the news that “Here they come!” Put out a little wire, the main thing was you got away from fooling around with the other troops and you could take some cocoa along and sort of lie _____ - _____(??) Regiment.

Mark: When did you leave the Aleutians?

Tibbetts: December, early December of ’43.

Mark: What I’m getting at here is how did you get out of the 87th and into the 34th Infantry?

Tibbetts: Oh, well that comes later. Am I boring you or anything?

Mark: No, no, absolutely not.

Tibbetts: Or talking about the wrong thing?

Mark: No, no.

Tibbetts: Got back to the States in December, Ft. McLaughlin or something in Seattle [May be Ft. McChord or Fort Lawton] and everybody got crippled. We’d been walking around on this spongy stuff and naturally they got you right out on asphalt parade grounds marching around, and everybody got *terrible* shin splints, had to creep around. Then we were going to get some leave and since I had been in quite a while and had never had any, I was up on the list so I got home Christmas Eve of ’43, which was very dramatic.

Mark: Home being Chicago?

Tibbetts: New York now, my people were in New York City.

Mark: You moved around a lot.

Tibbetts: Yeah. That was just like a B movie, a soldier comes home to visit parents on Christmas Eve. I had about ten days and then went back, the unit had moved to Camp Roberts outside of –not Denver— what’s the one south of it?

Mark: Colorado Springs.

Tibbetts: The Springs, which was just a little town in those days. We walked back and forth on low hills there for a little while and then went back to Hale for another winter, which was when we met the 85th and the 86th, _____(??) people, and had more mountain and winter warfare training. Then the unit moved to Texas – and if you’re a dedicated mountaineer, the thought of moving to Texas was ridiculous, especially if you wanted to fight fascism. So there was _____(??) when we got down there and it was hot as hell, and that’s OK. We had great, long marches – but why? Why are we, a mountain unit, in the sands of Texas while, the war passes us by? Quite a few people transferred out including me, by putting in for OCS, Officers Candidate School, and Infantry School in Ft. Benning, GA. You might get sent back to the unit, but by then they might have gotten out of this Texas thing. So I went to Benning in the summer of ’44 maybe, and became a 2nd lieutenant of Infantry. They sent some of those people back to the mountain unit and some of them ended up under ground in the Bulge, but I got sent out to New Guinea and they said, “Well, you’re a 2nd lieutenant now, when you get there some master sergeant may say, “Tibbetts, it’s good to see you, here’s your battalion.” Went to the West Coast and went out to a couple of places in New Guinea. There are times when it gets fuzzy. Oro Bay and Palladia and then up – incidentally we went out to New Guinea on a boat all by itself, they had some new troop ships built specially that they thought didn’t need escorts.

Mark: They thought they didn’t need escorts?

Tibbetts: Well, in our case, yeah—that’s right. They were trying to save naval units for more serious matters.

Mark: What sort of route did you take?

Tibbetts: Southwest. We didn’t stop anywhere. No, no. No stops till New Guinea. High speed travel. Incidentally up in the Aleutians it was interesting. Army transports, attack boats, had paravanes going out from behind them for mines all of the time. Some of it was so you could keep track of the other guys

paravane to see where you were it was so foggy some of us used to cut lines. So New Guinea and then they had the landings on Leyte in October and I went out as an officer replacement to Tacloban on Leyte and was offered a job with – I think they go through the papers and they see a college boy and they figure that guy should be on a staff he shouldn't be out there – with MacArthur's headquarters probably his mess officer or something, but I was still wanting to fight fascism so I said no, and they said they "Well they could sure use you out there" so Company B First Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment, 24th Division. But the 34th had a sort of history of its own as a 34th Infantry Regimental Combat Team with an artillery battalion attached and we did a fair amount of regimental work, separated from the Division but we were part of it. I think there had been a Hawaiian Regiment as part of the 24th, I mean that was the Regiment – the Division that was involved in *From Here to Eternity*. Jim – what's his name's division, the guy that wrote the book.

Mark: James Jones?

Tibbetts: Sure. So there was the 19th and the 21st regiments, both of which go back to the Civil War, 19th was "The Rock of Chickamauga" and a lot of regular Army connections. One of their telegrams when we were doing some sort of road block where you get surrounded on purpose was so the battalion commander—"Army Beach Notre Dame 44 to 0, biggest victory in so many years, you are the talk of the island" sort of thing. So we had a lot of regular Army, young guys as battalion commanders and regimental commanders. So it was an interesting unit. The 34th, 19th, and 21st all were and it was an interesting division. There was the 25th which was a similar unit. I never knew much about it but the shoulder patches were quite similar.

Mark: I'm really confused. Which one was the Americal Division?

Tibbetts: That's entirely different. My understanding of the Americal is that it was formed out there from any loose units and volunteers and trouble makers that people were trying to get rid of in New Caledonia, and never had a base in the United States. I'm not even sure it ever had a number. It may have been called the 40-something. It had a fine record – sort of romantic once it became a unit out there in the South Pacific.

Mark: So, I'm a little confused here. In the South Pacific you were not a combat infantry officer.

Tibbetts: Oh yeah. I was platoon leader in B Company of the 34th Infantry Regiment.

Mark: Were you fighting in New Guinea or was this in the Philippines?

Tibbetts: No. Hollandia was over, and I guess Palau and Peleliu had helped protect the

flanks for the landing in the Philippines in October and I didn't get there until Christmastime. So Leyte had been pretty well secured. That's where I came in and joined the 34th Infantry Regiment as a combat platoon leader.

Mark: So where did you finally see action in the Philippines? Was it on Leyte?

Tibbetts: No, it was on Luzon, from Leyte, the Regiment now operating separately from the Division, the 34th Infantry Regimental Combat Team was sent in at San Marcellino on Leyte, an unopposed landing, to try to see to it that the Japanese did not do what the Americans did in 1941, which was hole up on Bataan Peninsula. The landings on _____(??) had happened. So that group of our side were pushing Japanese down Leyte, I mean Luzon, which is a big island and up into Balangao and such places, and we were supposed to go in and keep those people from dribbling down and having a last ditch stand on Bataan, so we were coming in from the flank, the 34th. We went on down the coast road and liberated Olongapo, Subic Bay, of some subsequent fame and international relations, and we had a Little Battle of the Lighthouse and so forth.

Mark: What's the Little Battle of the Lighthouse?

Tibbetts: Well, the Japanese were hold up in the lighthouse out – some eminence sticking out from Subic Bay, and when you're going along the coast road with a bluff on one hand and a bluff on the other it doesn't take much to stop a whole regiment. So you have a couple of mortars and some machine guns and it takes a long time to run you out of there, which was what the Battle of the Light House was and then along Olongapo was defended by the Japanese. We got through Olongapo and the Japanese depart into the mountains of Bataan. So the next step is to try to get them in there. So, you go up on something called Zigzag Pass which zigzags on the way up the mountain, were also very easy to defend, and they sent the 38th Division in there which had real trouble so they pulled the division out and sent an experienced regiment in, 1/3 the strength of the division. We got a little farther, but we had very serious trouble. Japanese had some huge mortar, fired a thing the size of your waste basket, terrible concussion and fragments. They had a lot of dug outs and covered fox holes and so on and we couldn't seem to do anything about it. Get up there and you lose some people and you try to do it some more. We got kind of scattered and A Company got surrounded and C Company got all shot up. I was in B Company so I got moved from B Company because C Company lost all its officers. Then after two or three, or I don't know how many days of stalemate and trying to get around these people, making a couple of mistakes like finding them in the open and some fool opens fire and then being shelled by our own artillery which was unpleasant; our air bursts, and being encouraged by a two-star general to keep going, "very well." We pulled out and I think the written word was that until all available air and artillery is placed in this area, don't try it again. I had

forgotten we had that bad outpost thing too.

Mark: What do you mean bad outpost thing?

Tibbetts: Before we went into pass the company was told to send a small unit up about 800 feet up in the mountains, maybe a mile and a half, to tell the rest of the battalion that if the Japanese were there – “here they come” – sort of a – not much chance you’d be coming by so I took the group up there. We were attacked in the middle of the night but were able to make it until the next morning we had one guy, he was new and he got scared and jumped into some old guy’s hole – two guys in a fox hole. They thought he was Japanese and carved him up quite a bit and was sitting on him and suddenly he began to come to and they realized that they got one of their own guys. But he made it down and we had somebody else who was hurt but I don’t remember why and we had some Japanese casualties from throwing grenades and stuff and we didn’t want to fire, didn’t want them to know how few we were or where we were (printer making noise in background) so we chucked grenades around a little harder to see where they’re from. They sent a platoon up the next day to relieve us and we went back down. Carried this guy out, he did very well. That was the outpost thing, then Zigzag Pass, and then we got pulled out, and then we went to Mindoro.

Mark: OK. Let’s stop there for a second. I have some questions I want to give that a little more. So this was your first real combat experience.

Tibbetts: Yeah. Forget the Aleutians. That was a combat experience, but sort of empty.

Mark: Now you finally got your chance to fight fascism, as you say. You’ve mentioned this several times now, what I’m getting at is was it what you expected? Do you think you were properly trained and prepared for this kind of experience? Or can you possibly be?

Tibbetts: Sure. You can never be. You were properly trained but you are never ready for being shot at. I’m really quoting Charlton Ogburn who wrote a book called *The Marauders*, he writes very well. He was a writer before he got into it, that was the unit over in Burma. Nobody can prepare you for combat. No movies, no books, no nothing. The thought that somebody is trying to kill you, the good deed doing you, the one who never wanted anything but the best for everybody, and they may well succeed. It strikes you as something that is beyond your ken. So you’re never prepared and out there in Burma or the Philippines or New Guinea or anywhere else, it’s always what’s around the next bend. All of a sudden the peace of the rain forest will be shattered by machine gun fire. Nothing can prepare you for it. I suppose it is sort of elitist to say it but I think it’s true. There are no obstacle courses, no low fire over you as you crawl through barbed wire down in Fort Benning and think,

oh, wow. Nothing can prepare you for it.

Mark: What sort of thoughts go through a young infantry officer's mind in a situation like this?

Tibbetts: Well, you feel responsible. You want to protect your people. Now that's not very much of a – that's not much of an attacking thing but that's it. In an attack or in a defense you don't want anybody to get hurt. That doesn't say much.

Mark: No, maybe it says a lot.

Tibbetts: You have to do something. You got to get a squad over there and so you don't want to just tell Sergeant Tom he's got to take his people over there, I'll go over with you and we'll see what we can find. You don't want to get hit either – but you feel you've got to look after these people.

Mark: I had one infantry man I interviewed say he was confused describing to me how as a combat soldier the battle field is maybe five yards on either side and then maybe a thousand, two thousand yards long or something like that. Would that be your _____(??)?

Tibbetts: Even less, I think, in a jungle situation. You're the border of the United States at that moment – the lead scout. There is where Japan is and he's going in the direction of Japan and you are America, you are where America is. So you are the immediate boundary of these powers in conflict. On the other hand, generally you don't have the faintest idea what's happening to your left or right. The platoon even is hard to keep track of your squad. I ended up as a company commander and that was even more difficult to keep track of three rifle platoons and your weapons platoon. It's the guy next door.

Mark: What sort of communications did you have to keep track of people?

Tibbetts: We had sound power telephone which you crank with the leading units and often made a squeaking noise which was nerve-racking if you're sneaking up and we had the 536 radio, a hand-held battery powered push down short radio.

Mark: Were they reliable?

Tibbetts: Pretty reliable. I carried extra batteries. Pretty reliable, for a short distance, in the jungle they were fairly short. And runners, but the radio was really – if your radio didn't work and your line was out you had to send people.

Mark: I'd like to discuss the idea of leadership a little bit too. You did mention the

burden you felt of being responsible for the well being of your men. Perhaps you could tell me a little bit more about what it's like to lead these men into combat. Did you feel you had to set an example for them?

Tibbetts: Sure. You got to set an example. Eisenhower had a terrific speech to some officer's training class in London before the landings. "You are the best soldier in this platoon. You are the best trained. You are the best physical condition, you are the guy to whom these people will come and you had better be giving advice that they can trouble you with the guy that gets them out of trouble." I hadn't been exposed to his until I read about Eisenhower later on, but that's the way it ought to be and often is. They are your people and without being patriarchal about it, you're the same age or younger sometimes. You have to look after these people and you want to expose them to as little risk as possible, so who becomes the enemy sometimes? Company commanders. But mostly battalion and regiment – why these stupid bastards tell us to go over there? Why don't they get the artillery in on that place? Why don't they get us ammunition? And the enemy has probably got the same problem. You're going to knock them off, but it rains on them. It rains on you and they're probably mad at their regiments. I don't know if that comes close to the question.

Mark: Well, there is no answer. The answer is whatever you tell me. In leading men in combat, what are the – what would you characterize – say were the most difficult problems? You mentioned communications before. Did you have discipline problems? Soldiers breaking down?

Tibbetts: I don't remember any soldiers breaking down. There are times when AOE we called it (Accumulation of Everything) or FUO (Fever of Unknown Origin) when things like scrub typhus and so on weren't diagnosed, weird things people got. So along came this sort of general AOE and a guy just really couldn't function anymore and there really wasn't much you could do about it except perhaps put him on the jeep or something. I never remember a guy being petrified in his hole or anything of that sort. But I do remember thinking that it's time – this guy doesn't have enough points to rotate, but maybe within the unit you could do something about this. It's so hard to describe but the whole concept of what is leadership is worth a couple of Ph.D. theses. I was scared as hell too! Of course, you might have got shot yourself.

Mark: The whole subject of leadership is voluminous in terms of military literature.

Tibbetts: You do feel that if it has to be done, you better do it. You're out of water, what are you going to do? You are going to have to go back and get some. The whole area back there is under fire. OK. Tell the platoon, "I'm going back." What do you get? You get no water. They got cases of pineapple juice. #10 cans so you gotta bring a case of pineapple juice back which really

doesn't satisfy your thirst and sometimes you get back there and you got six #10 cans of pineapple juice and boy, you're thirsty. So, you take the first one and just jam a _____ (??) into it. Shouldn't do that as an officer. You ought to be the last one to drink it. Usually you are, but this time—.

Mark: This might seem like a silly question, but what makes you or a combat soldier not turn around and run the other way? What makes you go out there and?

Tibbetts: I think it's unit solidarity. You just can't do that.

Mark: You would be letting people down?

Tibbetts: You bet. I think I felt that as an enlisted man and also especially as an officer, what makes you do it. Another good, Charlton Ogburn, quote some of his people. "Well, you just have to take the next step." Anybody can do that, just so your hands aren't too slippery to you're your weapons, just take the next step, any child could do that.

Mark: I have one more thing I want to cover before we go to Mindoro and that is the effectiveness of the Japanese. As an infantry officer you were probably briefed on what kinds of things to expect from the Japanese. Would you characterize the Japanese as being a formidable opponent, were you accurately briefed on what to expect from them?

Tibbetts: I think so. Well trained, formidable, good soldiers and different. One thing we had to overcome was this idea of "sportsmanship" in combat. On the other side it seemed that if you surrounded the German unit and they put up a good fight, the time would come when they could send out a white flag or whatever – OK, they're POWs now. So early on, Guadalcanal and Loganville, places like that efforts were made to take prisoners because it's useful to have prisoners. It developed that wounded would be ready to blow themselves up and you. They would not hit our people in places where it would hurt, but they wouldn't kill them because they knew that we would go after them. This was an American custom to go after your hurt people and drag them back. So they'd wait till they got a guy out there and then they'd plug him too. Now you've got two people out there. This seemed incredibly barbaric and the banzai attack, Japanese people coming at you screaming, so we were told about this but coming up against this it was really what we could call culture clash, I guess, now. Then you began to realize that this is far more logical. Why do you shoot the hell out of the other side and then say, "Okay, fellows, good show. We quit. Why you sons of bitches, why should you quit?" So it became accepted. I never remember anybody shooting a Japanese prisoner because we never could take any prisoners. In the whole Pacific war, too, when it was over and they were valuable because in the Japanese view they were dead. They couldn't go home. Even if they were

in good shape. They could never go home so they'll tell you about anything you want. You have to be careful how you question these people, because they want to be polite. They're dead. "Is your command headquarters in that direction?" "Oh, yes, it's there." The hell it's there. But you asked a question and they don't want to say "no" so you have to ask "Where?" So prisoners were very valuable. This I think was a real jolt for the American soldiers. The implication that you have become ruthless, well in a sense, maybe you do. Why would the Japanese take prisoners? Prisoners are a pain in the neck. You got to feed them, you got to look after them if they are hurt, you got to cart them around. Very logical not to take prisoners. So this was my experience in the Pacific war.

Mark: It's war at its most basic level.

Tibbetts: Pretty much so. _____ (??) they go destroy Carthage, you destroy everybody, and the problem is gone.

Mark: It's interesting actually. So let's move on to more of these campaigns; Mindoro.

Tibbetts: Mindoro didn't turn out to be a campaign. Part of the unit went on to retake Corregidor. I didn't get involved in that and we went on down to Mindoro and I guess what we were doing was getting ready to go to Mindanao as it turned out. We didn't know that at the time. So, this was a training and I guess I was executive officer by then but maybe I was still a platoon leader and we got some replacements. I think I was not company commander then. But I was the experienced officer along probably with a couple of company men and our job was to train the replacements. We had some interesting things on Luzon when they pulled us out--, defending an air field or something. We were-- pretty much not much of us left. That's an exaggeration but we had taken a lot of casualties up there so we were kind of short of troops. So having been through some of this stuff, I felt that it was important to set up sort of jungle courses and we had a little river and banks and so I had our people go out and dig a whole bunch of holes and play Japanese. New guys. This turned out to be quite successful and it also turned out that I was a good lecturer on weapons and battalion and regiment would bring visiting dignitaries around to listen to me tell jokes about hand grenades and stuff so it was kind of a nice interval and you feel that instead of people running around throwing themselves on the ground you made them go out in small units and cross the river and then I had the old timers popping at them with blank ammunition. We pulled the bullets out and just had the stuff, and life is real, life is earnest. It still doesn't prepare really, but it's scary as hell if you are suddenly fired at from three feet away when you didn't know anybody was there. So, I felt this was real good training.

On Mindoro, and we had now some old timers, maybe two or three who took

exception to close order drill and couldn't understand this. You are so intense and sort of back to peace time Army so you got to do close order drill for half an hour and some of these guys just really goof up on purpose.

Mark: This would be your NCOs or something?

Tibbetts: No. These were privates, former NCOs who had been degraded for one reason or another and they would look terrible so I thought, OK, I sympathize with these people. This is pretty stupid so I had them go off in the tall weeds and do close order drill all by themselves. Why discipline? There's no point to it. They'll be fine when we get shot at again and they're good soldiers--, away dealing with these things.

Mark: This brings us to topics I was interested in anyway. One involves replacements. I am interested in how they gel with the veterans that were in your unit. If you read the literature on the Vietnam War—.

Tibbetts: That's what I think was awful. No units in Vietnam. You don't even know the guy's name, and he's dead next day and nobody cared.

[Recording cuts out and resumes]

Mark: We were still talking about replacements and the question asked Mr. Tibbetts was how many replacements did he find, did he need in his unit and how did they gel with the veterans in the unit.

Tibbetts: I don't know how many, I seem to remember that in a platoon we might get a dozen combinations of battle casualties and illness and rotation. Maybe even more – four platoons, 48 people, that's almost a third to a quarter, a *full* table of organization and you were never up to that anyhow. I would meet them and talk with them and my feeling was that you need these people and you want them to feel at home and they're scared as hell, over from the States and all sorts of jerking around, getting to where they are and here are all these grizzled veterans, yellowed from Atabrin [anti malarial] and they were musty looking and all the fatigues were obviously old and faded and here they are in nice green stuff with new jungle packs and combat boots and they feel awful. So there was some riding – maybe, but not if I heard about it and the NCOs also understood the importance of these guys and they might kid around about the jungle packs and stuff, but it wouldn't take long to make these people. Now when they came up individually, this was bad because maybe we're in contact with the Japanese and with luck you got a jeep load of ammunition and some water and some food and a couple of replacements, and maybe you didn't even ever know their names. Next morning some mortar round would land them in a hole or something and they – very, very bad sort of thing. So it was when you were in semi garrison, in between actions, they would bring people up, pitiful and I don't think there was much of this harassment stuff

and certainly as soon as things started flying, they were your pals.

Mark: Did you get a sense of, how should I say this, of the quality of these men? Were they getting younger, more stupid, or better?

Tibbetts: Not more stupid, but younger yes. I was by then about 22 or 23 and felt paternal. I think it was in the Philippines that I decided I'd make a career of teaching history in a secondary school, which I never did, because some of these guys didn't know where they were or why they were there. This seemed also kind of pitiful if you are risking your life for your country and you don't quite understand why you are out here. I thought maybe secondary education. About this time, maybe before that, they had an A & E program. What did that stand for? Maybe it wasn't A & E—. They had an educational unit that showed movies – excellent films. There was a “Why we fight” series and some lectures by some competent and some incompetent people about the world situation.

Mark: What was discipline in the field? Was there a lot of “Yes, Sir”, “No, Sir”, saluting, did you--

Tibbetts: No, there wasn't. It became evident early in the Pacific, I guess starting on Guadalcanal that officers were fine targets insofar as you could see anything. So your officer designation and NCO stripes were removed. There was also, training manual stuff, don't call him lieutenant or he won't be there long. Well, that's a come on in some respects. If you want to get rid of your officer, “Hey, lieutenant!” I didn't wear bars, didn't make a thing of it. We called a sergeant, a sergeant, but I think they called me “Tibbetts,” but also lieutenant, it's a designation. I don't think there was any of this buddy-buddy stuff, but you're not going to call him sergeant or an officer because you don't want him to get shot. After a while you don't go in for lieutenant, sergeant stuff – you're a unit and I think it was last names mostly.

Mark: If you are out in the jungle fighting, you obviously don't have much time to shave and those kinds of things.

Tibbetts: That's correct.

Mark: That sort of thing went by the wayside?

Tibbetts: By the wayside.

Mark: One of the things that's described is “chicken shit” [enforcement of petty military regulations and meaningless activities], are you familiar with that term?

Tibbetts: Oh, yeah.

- Mark: Everyone's got a different definition. Perhaps you could tell me a little bit about what you think it was and then, as an officer, perhaps your own perspective on it.
- Tibbetts: Goodbye to Mickey Mouse and all that. There is a pretty good book about that – about flying bombers over the European theater. Well, having close order drill on Mindanao was chicken shit up to a point. On the other hand, you can't have troops just sitting around. They have to do something because there is a need to keep people occupied. So it is for combat troops who have been through hell, the out there doing right face, left face is chicken shit. I know it's chicken shit as a platoon leader, and some of the guys know it's chicken shit, but we're going to do it. The best example of this if you're willing to listen it came after the war ended and we were in Japan. This group of battle hardened veterans if over in Japan and occupying the country and we're in some Japanese barracks and it's long about maybe October of '45 and I was now company commander, that happened on Mindanao I guess and our company was designated as cool troops. That is, we were supposed to maintain a perfect garrison arrangement in this old Japanese barracks and demonstrate tactics and close order drill and all this stuff for budding officers who were coming over from the States. We were told by this Colonel Beach that we had to fold our underwear in this fashion and have polished shoes and have the barracks absolutely clean and he would take second lieutenants through it and if there was anything wrong, I'd hear about it, and I heard about it. So, I considered that chicken shit, so I went to a regimental commander, a man named Wheeler, with whom I had been associated for some time and I said, "This won't do." He said, "I think maybe you've got something, but I'll give it some thought." So the next day, he showed up at the same time as this artillery colonel in charge of the school and said, "I'd like to go around with you." So he and I and the artillery colonel went around through the barracks and before the artillery colonel could say anything, Wheeler said, "My, this looks nice. Oh, I think this is beautiful. Your troops are doing so good. I'm proud of C Company." The colonel was completely on the cuff. I also held a mass meeting with the troops. We gathered in the mess tent and I said, "This is the way it is. We are schooled troops. We are going to have to put up with this stuff. You don't put up with it, then there's going to be stockade time and all this stuff, and I won't be able to control that. So, let's have some fun and do it. Just do it right, do it right." And, they did. They played the game. But I, given that phrase, would say this was a classic example of dealing with chicken shit.
- Mark: Was this more prevalent after the war ended do you think? Or, did you see more?
- Tibbetts: Maybe more prevalent afterwards 'cause you have to do something. You got all these Army people hanging around and you got to keep occupied. I can't

remember gross examples of it. Whenever a campaign was over they'd mow the jungle and get you out there with a band and march up and down, I think guys thought it was chicken shit. On the other hand, you've got that band playing, a few silver stars are handed out, front and center, and it pumps you up a little bit. I can hardly stand it when I hear band music – it's so emotional. The guys think it's pretty stupid. We had another major who was chicken shit but his executive officer was not. This major was very critical which was often demoralizing and the company commanders went to the Executive Officer and said, "Come on. Straighten this guy out. All he does is criticize, these are good men and they've been through a lot, they should be praised." _____(??). The next parade we had we were particularly awful, but the major was standing there as we marched off the field, slouched off the field and he said, "That was just fine, Tibbetts, tell the men." You could just see how he'd worked himself up to this under the advice of his experienced executive officer. It made a lot of difference. To see the guys who heard it, they heard it, "well all right damn it." There was this sort of undercurrent that's interesting, all of it.

Mark: Mindanao. What do you do there?

Tibbetts: They told us in Mindoro to be prepared for being wet almost all the time in the coastal highway. We had this pegged as Borneo, and we thought Jesus, up to your waist in water and tremendous Japanese resistance, it wasn't that. Mindanao – heavily populated by Japanese civilians and millions of Japanese troops. It's an exaggeration, but lots of them. We went in as a regiment and in fact the division went in there, President Roosevelt died while we were going there. People felt this. We were on an LST [Landing Ship Tank], which was odd, that was one of the larger shoe-box things. We had artillery on the top deck and expected a combat landing at a place named Purang. The geography of this island is odd. It's got this big Zamboanga peninsula. We went around that and came on up to this town on the river, the Cotabato River and had plenty of naval support and stuff, but we went in without bombardment and they weren't there. So now we're going to go up the river and one thinks about a Vietnam movie, which I could never bring myself to see, where this guy goes up the river

Mark: Apocalypse Now?

Tibbetts: Yeah. It was that sort of thing. We had landing boats with 50 caliber machine guns and we had a couple of peculiar Army river boats somehow had gotten over there with maybe three inchers on them and nobody knowing where the Japanese were or what they were going to do so we go barreling up the Cotabato River for quite a ways, completely unprotected and land at a place called Fort Pikit where there seems to be something called Route One which is sort of a semi-asphalt dirt road that goes across the island for many miles and hits the coast at Digos moving up toward Davao, which is the big

city. So now we start walking and unfortunately too many people had taken this wet feet seriously and had worn things called jungle boots, which were high topped sneakers which ruin your feet if you are walking and more and more limping and sort of trying to pirate GI shoes, and I was limping so bad that I decided to hell with it and I took my radio man and we were told we were supposed to go up there and dig in and I said, "Well, I'm going. I can't take any of this anymore till I get some shoes." So, off we went. Sparks and me. His name was Augrey Tines Sparks from Texas, as sort of lead on men, everybody else hobbled along behind. We got up there and managed to find a place to begin and that was our last peaceful period. Thereafter we were crossing mountainous terrain heading toward the ocean so it was a curvy road, lot of bridges, all of which the Japanese defended and it doesn't take much. You wait till the lead scout comes around the corner and you shoot him or at him and that means you have to develop a base of fire and you got to get a squad up there and a VAR [??] and preferably a machine gun and so forth. Then you have a fire fight and then they blow the bridge and retire half a mile down the road to the next bridge, same thing. Which was where we learned to set up mortars without the base plate. If you set up the base plate and the tripod and all that stuff it takes time so we got mortar guys to just take the tube, sit down, hold it between their legs carefully, and just drop rounds down it and tilt it back and forth. You get a lot of mortar fire real quick. So this became the bridge thing until we got to Digos, the coast. Because the Japanese all their defense was pointing in the wrong way we came in behind them, very effective _____ (??) move, tactically. Then we started up the coast road without much opposition and then we turned left into the mountains toward Mt. Apo and were in constant contact I guess until we were worn out and they pulled us back to the coast.

Mark: Your replacement – some unit came to replace you?

Tibbetts: Yeah. Well the 19th and the 21st, part of the division, we may have been working in series. They may have put the 21st of the 19th in to keep moving back. We were really pushing the Japanese back into the hills and I think there are probably some of them still there.

Mark: They pop up every now and then.

[Talking over each other, unintelligible]

Tibbetts: We went back to the coast and - oh, I know, on Mindanao I got pulled out. I got sick.

Mark: Malaria or something?

Tibbetts: All of it. Also jaundice. It got to the point where I didn't give a damn. We got cut off and I was cussing out the battalion on the radio to get something up

to us and they sent up some tank destroyers to blow out some hill boxes and I just didn't care and they had to go around me and then I went back to the hospital, flown back I guess, to Leyte, it's all sort of fuzzy. In May I guess I came back to the outfit and that's when it was on the beach. They had continued operations for a while and then were pulled out, went to the beach, tents, and stuff. That was really the end of it.

Mark: My next question was do you recall learning that the Japanese had surrendered?

Tibbetts: In the main Islands, Oh yes! We were still running patrols and stuff. You'd go out and get building materials for your tents and so on. We'd get into fire fights with whatever was out there. But, it was not too serious. But we were still in contact when they dropped the bomb. First one, second one, unbelievable.

Mark: What was your reaction and the reactions of those around you?

Tibbetts: First, we heard that they had dropped a bomb the equivalent to 20,000 tons of TNT. So, first it's "How is that possible?" And then they dropped another one? And then your expectations would go up and then you hear that it's over. I wonder how many million feelings of born again and really it was if you talk about the born again Christian. There was this feeling that there was no future in this kind of warfare and you look at the map and where the Germans were and the Japanese. We left to go west it was the golden gate in '48, was the motto, if you could make it to '48 and you hardly believed in the rest of your life at all. Suddenly, this rosy picture – the girl at home, family, things you like to do sort of muddied by the fact that there is still maybe 25,000 Japanese on this island who have given a pretty good demonstration that they are not about to quit ever! How do you deal with that? So it was modified rapture and a great reluctance to expose yourself to anything now that it appeared to be over or to expose, as a company commander, your own troops to anything risky and here your division, battalion, regiment really become the enemy. We are going to send your company to make a sweep of this area. "Well, stuff it for God's sake!" You got guys who have been through many, many actions, why should they or the new guys be exposed to this?

Mark: Were there fire fights and things like that after the initial surrender?

Tibbetts: Yeah. I think we only had a couple of small ones. We were in this heavily Moro island. The Moros were there in full force, half a million, very tough cookies, beetle nut chewers and _____(??) and very good soldiers and they fight anybody. That's where the 45 was developed in 1903 because you couldn't stop a Moro with a Springfield rifle, they said. So, they sort of wanted to keep going. When my company went back to Fort Pikit, amongst

countless Japanese, worked with some guerilla units there trying to take prisoners. Leaflets were dropped and the Moros would intercept troops, Japanese ones, and cut off their heads and leave them in piles at the trail junction which _____(??) or bring them into the company tents. So it was hard. We were sent out as a company to take prisoners at Pikit and I said, we took two, built a stockade and I was supposed to send out patrols and I did, but I expected them and they fulfilled this expectation, of going maybe 200 yards out under a tree, setting up a machine gun and stopping. Then they sent the 38th regiment out to relieve us and we had a battle with them.

Mark: Mistaken identity?

Tibbetts: No, no they were arrogant bastards. They wanted to take our prisoners into their stockade. I wouldn't let them. But they were majors and I was still a 1st lieutenant, but I had a brigadier general on the radio and stuff like that. A bit of inter-unit rivalry.

Mark: I assume when the 38th came that was when you went to Japan. So you left Mindanao which really hadn't settled down yet, the situation was still unclear?

Tibbetts: Oh, yeah. We were glad to get out of there. Then there was the prospect of what about Japan? Will they obey the Emperor? Our unit went in on Shikoku one of the smaller big islands, a town named Matsuyama. So here we are an army personnel attack with naval escort, going past these huge rocks with Japanese muzzles of cannons pointing out, going to a beach landing. We had a couple of cruisers in support and everything and loaded full bear and full ammunition and bayonets and stuff, hit the beach, which we did unopposed. I don't think I'm making this up -- My recollection is that coming over the dunes was a line of Japanese civilians who bowed and they had brought out what wheeled vehicles they had to escort the victors into the town of Matsuyama and there were plenty of sullen Japanese soldiers around but they were unarmed and in being there several months, we only had one fight, a fist fight between one of our people and a Japanese guy.

Mark: This was in September?

Tibbetts: Went in September stayed until January of '46.

Mark: What sort of duties were you doing during the occupation?

Tibbetts: School troops. This sort of Mickey Mouse thing. That's about all we did, and you have to train.

Mark: What sort of relationship with the Japanese did you have?

Tibbetts: The kids were awful cute. The civilians were very polite in the tradition, the soldiers were surly, and they didn't do any guerrilla warfare. I think if that had happened in the States it would still be going on. Pot shots and so on. But it was the discipline of the Emperor. It is over. I remember one, "take your shoes off" conference that involved something at the regimental level where we were squatting around painfully, talking to the Japanese about some domestic problem at the time. School troops.

Mark: Was there much resentment among the troops about being in Japan? After all you had been fighting the Japanese--

Tibbetts: It was over. We didn't care where we went. They had the point system by then and rotation was pretty civilized by then. You got points for being in and points for overseas and I think points for decorations and purple hearts. So this was a time when guys were saying "Hey man, you remember when I - - Well, yeah," "I think we can--five points," or "Do you remember that such and such, you should have got a Silver Star for that." Of course, they really did, sort of taken as "all in a days work," but when you start writing it up, it comes out very good. There's five more points, so the idea was to get as many points as possible, to be rotated.

Mark: So in January of '46, your points were up.

Tibbetts: Yeah. Maybe February, I forget which. It came kind of suddenly, you turn over the company to somebody else.

Mark: How'd you feel leaving? I suppose some of these men you had fought with--

Tibbetts: Well, they were going, they were leaving, some of them weeping almost. Guys who had been around for a long time – even rotating during combat they found it difficult to leave. Hard to believe that, but it is true. A feeling of "Oh, Boy I'm going home! But look at what I'm leaving." These guys aren't going to be here long. It sort of loosened up, you became – there were a lot more replacements coming in and replacement of officers from West Point as 2nd lieutenants, who were sort of astounded at the informality which had crept into the infantry units. They were Army and very respectful, coming in and, two of them, I remember, came to our company to be platoon leaders, a lot the reporting and so forth and so on, you play up to that to a point, but you give them a little fatherly advice from your exalted 23 or 24 year old age. My impression of West Point officers was that of good men. Not so much at that level because they were new but the battalion and up – very few dummies.

Mark: I can imagine. I was wondering if you could describe your transportation home and coming home and where you went. It's hard to keep track of you sometimes.

Tibbetts: It's hard for me to remember. I got my points and turned the company over to Lieutenant something or other. A fat red-headed guy, but a good officer. I went somewhere and I seem to remember it was sort of rural because I remember Japanese houses with tiles, got on a ship somewhere, and took two weeks to come home. I was in a cabin sort of compressed with 3 or 4 other officer passengers, got to the States somewhere around San Francisco – a funny name – up the river if there is a river.

Mark: Yeah, there is.

Tibbetts: What's the name of the Army thing there?

Mark: All I can think of is Alameda, and I don't think that's right.

Tibbetts: It began with "S." It was sort of like a steel town, Pittsburgh, or something. I was interviewed and talked about whether I wanted a physical for things like malaria and dengue fever and hepatitis. If that involved staying around, no, I didn't want that. So then they sent me to New Jersey, Camp Dix. My people were in New York City. I remember nothing about the trip across the States which was probably by train. I was given something or other at Dix. I don't remember how long I was there and then I went home. The only person home was my brother who is 15 years younger than I was so he was just a kid. I don't really remember these things.

Mark: That's too bad. Were you discharged?

Tibbetts: Yeah. Discharged. They offered reserve status. They said they'd put me in as a captain. I'd been a 1st lieutenant all this time, maybe I was a captain, acting or whatever. They wanted experienced officers, they didn't know about Korea at that time. They wanted some experienced officers around to look after the still huge army that they had. I declined and boy am I glad because the 24th division was the first one in on Korea, nothing left of it, really torn to pieces.

Mark: I see. So you were out free and clear.

Tibbetts: Out free and clear, that's it.

Mark: So you returned to New York City. What were your priorities for your post-service life? For example, did you finish college at Harvard?

Tibbetts: Yeah. I did. Lucky, because I didn't get nailed. I didn't get invited in until I got a sort of early degree. I worked with a unit called, something called Americans United for World Government. It seemed like a good idea. I volunteered a couple of times a week in New York City and I applied to Columbia Teachers College on this theory that teenagers needed more

education about life, and was accepted. Then there is another sort of a blank place, because I was scheduled to go to teachers college and I never went. I don't remember why, making any conscious decision. It's odd that these blank places came after getting home. Then I'd been in the CCC a little bit in an odd way before the war (Civilian Conservation Corps) and I was interested in the idea of what now is in this national service thing, but I was also interested in the trade unions because of my Chicago experience with steel workers, packing house workers, etc. So I sort of drifted in that direction, ended up working in a textile factory in Allentown, PA then becoming a staff representative for textile workers.

Mark: I see. How'd you get to Wisconsin?

Tibbetts: Been working for the union down south in Virginia and North Carolina. University of Wisconsin has a program called School for Workers, part of the Wisconsin idea to serve everybody in which eight or ten extension people who teach night classes, weekend institutes, one week schools to union members, officers and staff in areas like labor law, contract negotiation, grievance handling, work measurement, blah, blah, blah. I was invited to come up from the textile workers union and serve on the staff of the School for Workers, which I did for 30 years.

Mark: When did you come to this state?

Tibbetts: Mid-50's.

Mark: I'm interested in your involvement in trade unionism and these kinds of things and I'm wondering if there is any connection to the war and the ideals that the war engendered.

Tibbetts: Or what I went in with too.

Mark: Did you have these values before you went in?

Tibbetts: I considered it, before. I was raised a Baptist. "You are your brother's keeper" sort of stuff.

Mark: I'll come back to some of these things in a sec. Before I forget, I want to talk about medical problems after the service. Having been in the jungle and contracted fevers and those kinds of things did you have any sort of medical conditions that plagued you after the war?

Tibbetts: Still do. My feet have never quite recovered from the mountain warfare training and also the Aleutians where you get rotten feet. I have spots that freeze very quickly, tips of my fingers, my nose and ears and stuff. I think for ten years after the war, whenever I got a fever it was real fever – 104, 105.

Whether that was connected with the malaria, dengue stuff, I don't know. Otherwise I guess not.

Mark: Did you seek treatment from VA?

Tibbetts: No. Never. I didn't want to get tangled up with the veterans at that point. It probably would have worked fine. I didn't want back into the machine again.

Mark: That comes to my next area of questions that involves involvement in veteran's organizations.

Tibbetts: AVC [American Veterans Committee] did you ever hear of that?

Mark: I'm quite familiar with that, it's an unstudied group. You got involved with the AVC in New York?

Tibbetts: Oh yes. Citizens first, veterans second. I was in Allentown by then and there was a group of right thinking veterans who disdained the Legion [American Legion] as a bunch of grubby beer drinkers.

Mark: Let's discuss the AVC vision of the veteran in the post-war world and what attracted you to that group?

Tibbetts: Just because the Legion did seem like mostly World War I farts and the VFW less so, but still – so let's have our own organization and somehow I had read something by Chuck Bolte who started it. He had his leg shot off in Africa because he'd been an early participant and I knew some guys maybe through the CCC who had gotten involved. Names that I knew – Gil Harrison and so on. And this was a good idea to have our own organization, about 14 million, so that's why I went into it.

Mark: Were you involved?

Tibbetts: Went to meetings, that's all.

Mark: The local meetings.

Tibbetts: Local meetings in Allentown. Then I began to see some more people who were involved and I wasn't all that enthusiastic.

Mark: So you left the group?

Tibbetts: I left the group. I just left Allentown and down south, hell, you aren't going to find an AVC in Virginia!

Mark: That is probably true. What did you discuss at the meetings? Post-war

politics? Red hot politics? That sort of thing?

Tibbetts: No, not really. No, it was more – let's look after – some of that – let's be citizens first, the GI Bill and look after the veteran housing loans and helping the veteran out. There wasn't all this much of this red hot politics stuff, not where I was. Maybe at the national level.

Mark: What sort of veterans would join this group?

Tibbetts: Mostly college types – almost exclusively college types.

Mark: In a place like Allentown?

Tibbetts: Yeah. “Cause there is Muhlenberg College is there and Gettysburg is not far away. Young guys in business, young guys in the professions.

Mark: New Dealer types?

Tibbetts: Probably. Quite exclusive in that sense, it was hard. I don't think the AVC ever could have reached out and gotten a hold of the guys in the mills and so forth. It's not the place to drink beer.

Mark: Activism wasn't what they wanted. Did you get involved in other groups later?

Tibbetts: No. I think my respect for the work of the Legion and the VFW increased over time.

Mark: In what sense?

Tibbetts: Well, you had veterans service officers and a general advancement of the status of the veteran and the social place and that's needed. Nobody really understands except people that have been in a place to talk to people. I got a letter from a guy I haven't seen since '43 – mountain troops. He had left the unit, got married, and ended up in Italy, in another infantry. He said, “You got any pictures?” I said yeah, so I sent him some pictures and got a two-page letter back. It's just though we never parted. He has had these experiences. I wrote Christmas cards to the company. I had about 67 addresses for about three or four years. The feeling being successful bank president or successful bank robber my door latch was open. I don't care what you're doing.

Mark: Have you attended reunions or anything like that?

Tibbetts: I did join the 24th Infantry Division Association and wrote a couple of things for them. If you want those I can—

Mark: I'd be curious to see them, sure.

Tibbetts: I brought one. The 87th has a big one – I mean the 10th Mountain has a big one, but too many people from the 86th and 85th. Candy-ass bastards _____(??) with those types. I'm a *real* mountain infantry man.

Mark: Those are all the questions I have. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Tibbetts: I don't think so. I'm going to have bad dreams for a while.

Mark: I'm sorry about that. Actually, that does bring up another area. When you think of the Vietnam Veterans, we all saw in the mass media the problems they experienced coming back. You think of the psychological problems, perhaps the stereotypical problems of the Vietnam Veterans. Did you or people you know experience these sorts of psychological problems or problems finding work or being accepted back into society?

Tibbetts: Hard to say. Nobody had a name for it. Post Vietnam Stress Syndrome. Oh, there's something – maybe I've got it. There is no Post World War II Stress Syndrome. And maybe there wasn't as much because of the way they handled the infantry soldiers in Vietnam. No unit identification, 12 months and out for God's sake. Going out on a chopper mission and coming home and seeing a movie that night and going out again? Weird! So I think maybe that was a special case. I think it stays with you forever. I have nothing but the deepest sympathy for these guys. I thought the war was kind of stupid. Then I go on a march here, in fact, I helped organize Veterans for Peace, then I got ashamed of them. You'd march in what you thought was to demonstrate a general questioning about this conflict and I'd get up to the Capitol and we got the Spartacus Brigade, is the first speaker, and the gay and lesbian force is the next speaker, and I thought "What the hell is this?" We're looking after this soldier out there and I identified with these guys because of the nature of the combat, the close action, the booby-traps, the general messiness of it, I still got the hat but I couldn't do that. Not for these guys. I really felt it was, whatever the political situation was, these were troops carrying out national policy and damn it, they should be supported!

Mark: That's interesting. That's all I had. Thanks for coming in.

[Interview continued several months later]

Today's date is March 6th 1995. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum doing a follow up interview with Norris Tibbetts.

Mark: We have three things on the agenda today. First of all we're going to go over some photographs that Mr. Tibbetts donated and he's going to tell me a little bit about the background about them and who's on them to record that

information as fully as possible. Second of all we're going to discuss his experiences with actual Filipino's in the Philippines, some of the Mindanao as an ethnographically diverse region. It might be interesting to record some of those experiences and third we're going to discuss Mr. Tibbetts activities during the Vietnam War as well. Good afternoon, welcome back. Thanks for stopping in again. So let's just get into these photographs here. I'm going to number on the back of these photographs and this is number one here. You can just tell me a bit about what's on these pictures, who these people are and if you're on any of them.

Tibbetts: One regular Army sergeant, corporal at the time, my platoon Sergeant Gage, Corporal Rector and Private First Class Nelson. These were guys that were fairly tough cookies in the noncommissioned officer group in Company G-87 Mountain Infantry Regiment.

Mark: This is number two.

Tibbetts: This is a fellow named Borral, who was quite old for our group, maybe late 20's, a mountain trained person, but quite well educated who is displaying what happens when frustration sets in. Jim Borral unfortunately died a few years ago.

Mark: Number three.

Tibbetts: Hunter Liggett Military Reservation, tents, shortly after we got there we were engaged in maneuvers in the mountains, this was in the fall of 1942.

Mark: Number Four.

Tibbetts: Part of the squad I was in at Hunter-Liggett. Degrace, Tibbetts, Gordon Dick and a fellow named Escola. I heard from Gordon Dick a few weeks ago.

Mark: Five.

Tibbetts: This is Tibbetts in a marshall move with the new helmets, a machete, which was new and the old 16-inch bayonet, mounted on the rifle.

This is a rather odd thing, two horses a couple of guys on them, the mounted infantry. This is on the summit of the Santa Lucia Range looking out to the Pacific, partly maneuvers and partly wondering whether we might see some Japanese coming in that way. Just in case.

This is before Hunter-Liggett, this is the barracks in Fort Lewis, Tacoma, Washington, clean-up time a lot of people there, I got names on the back but I won't try to go into it.

Citizen soldiers, this is the squad at Hunter-Liggett again, with the addition of one guy whose name I forget. With the only distinctive thing they gave the mountain troops, which was the hat. A lot of people felt there should be some sort of fancy uniforms for the mountain infantry, but the Army resisted that.

Tired, this is Tibbetts who is tired on some hike in Hunter-Liggett Military Reservation.

Back to Fort Lewis, this is real early, good old Will O’Niece, fellow named Carl, Tibbetts, Thurston and Coffin. Private first class, we all made PFC. Took a couple of months.

Pretty picture of the terrain around Hunter-Liggett Military Reservation with Tibbetts there. Squad tent, Hunter-Liggett on Christmas of ’42. Gordon Dick is looking at our little old Christmas wreath.

On into the winter, Jim Borral again coming back from a couple of weeks in snowy mountains up at 10, 12, 13,000 feet. Note the length of the skis and the size of the pack and the length of the whiskers.

Mark: This is number 13, so we’ve lost track here.

Tibbetts: Here is Coffin, Escola and Phillip Putner, up Resolution Canyon, outside of Camp Hale. Note the skins around Coffin, he’s the guy with the rifle that you can see in the pipe. We carried skins for climbing up, huge skis. We had a choice of seven-foot and seven-foot six.

Mark: What are skins?

Tibbetts: Skins you put on the bottom of the skis to climb uphill without having to herringbone [A maneuver to get uphill on skis].

Mark: I’m not a skier.

Tibbetts: Keep going?

Mark: Oh, Yeah.

Tibbetts: Some maneuver, the winter of ’43, try anything to get around.

This is a dogsled team, bring rations, ammunition.

Tibbetts resting, worth noting there is the kind of goggles they gave us, pretty primitive, but it’s all we could get. I sent home for prescription sunglasses.

Weapons platoon moving over toward Homestake Peak on maneuvers.

Sledges pulling sledges [Sled].

Tibbetts: Here is a man we considered to be old, old, old, probably 30. Ed Page, he had false teeth.

Mark: That was number 19. 30 years old huh?

Tibbetts: Yeah. Heavy-laden marching on skis toward some maneuver or other up at Tennessee Pass. Heavy packs. First year, '43, they were extremely heavy. Went up to the Aleutians, came back, second year we cut half the weight out by substituting things that were lighter than what we were issued.

Maneuvers again. I see Bennett, a Finnish guy whose name escapes me and Escola and Tibbetts.

The OCC [Operation Control Center] Barracks up at Tennessee Pass, where on rare occasions they let us sleep indoors, we slept here and on the horizon are the, they call them the College Range, Mount Princeton, Mount Harvard, Mount whatever.

Jim Borral again. My tent mate on this operation, getting ready to cook a meal, probably supper outside. The tents that we used the first year and didn't take the second year because they frosted up and dumped it on you. We took shelter halves and dug into the snow.

Tibbetts, with the 90 pounds of rucksack, 7-foot skis, generally tired. After the long _____(?).

A message dog with a little silver thing, try anything in the snow. Put the message in, -- do you like dogs?

Mark: I do like dogs. I prefer dogs to cats actually.

Tibbetts: I like them both.

Mark: He had a name?

Tibbetts: I can't remember, but he was a perky dog, as you can see. I don't remember how they trained them but they did pretty well in that respect.

Gordon Dick in a snow cave when we weren't tactical, that is, supposed to be dark and quiet. We'd still stay out in the snow and we'd practice digging snow caves and stuff and bring in pine boughs. That's taken with a 620 Kodak with ordinary film and a candle, is what provided the light, warmed it up.

This believe it or not is what Vail ski area looked like before they made it. Tibbetts up at the top of the ridge on a fairly warm day as you can see.

Mark: Yeah, it seems like it.

Tibbetts: A lot of sun.

Mark: It's probably all hotels in there now.

Tibbetts Oh, well, that's ski area now, _____(?), everything down in the valley. What now?

Mark: Kiska.

Tibbetts: All right, this would have been landing at Quisling Cove. You have to have the right perspective, the ocean, the little place we got in a couple of boats at a time, we got face paint on, we still think the Japanese are there but they haven't fired on us yet.

Mark: So who took this photograph here?

Tibbetts: I did. I carried the camera and oddly enough much of it produced results, but not all of it.

This was Kiska.

Mark: That's number 28.

Tibbetts: A couple of fellows whose names I've forgotten. Pretty primitive living conditions, this area was known as Pancho Villa.

Mark: These are enlisted guys here?

Tibbetts: Oh yeah. I was enlisted at this time too. I was assistant squad leader during this period. In fact this was before they started bestowing rank on the infantry. Air Corp had a whole lot of rank in these days even squad leaders were corporals, assistant squad leader, and private first class. About a year later they boosted everybody up. Buck sergeant, squad leader, corporal, second in command, staff sergeant, platoon guard, technical sergeant, platoon sergeant.

This is Adak. Some of the naval support that was going to be offered for the Aleutians operation, this is also the bay harbor at Adak with boats, it looks like transports of one sort or another.

On Kiska, Kiska volcano with a few tents. That went up, I think, to about 4,000 feet, and on a rare clear day.

Mark: That's number 32.

Tibbetts: 34, sorry if we're out of sequence. This is Kiska, two squad tents joined together and dug in against anticipated bombing by the Japanese, or a return of the Japanese. It was so surprising in summer of '43 for the Japanese to leave anywhere, willingly, that there was considerable concern that they might return.

Mark: I'd be curious, did you have trouble digging in to that soil?

Tibbetts: No, that was volcanic ash. We had trouble keeping it there once we dug in. It began to slump toward the tents so we had to fill up sand bags and try to hold it in that fashion. It was quite easy to dig in. In fact, early bombardment in these operations, by battleships, couldn't see where they were firing, but they dug beautiful fox holes, sixteen inch, shells, good foxholes.

This is a view of Kiska Harbor from some patrol we were on looking to see if anything was left from the Japanese and checking out land mines and stuff.

Mark: Who is this guy, do you know?

Tibbetts: No. But you can see little Kiska on the horizon and the harbor with some ships in it.

Mark: That's number 35.

Tibbetts: A change of diet, using concussion grenades to throw in the streams, feeder streams. Pretty small but deep, in which it turned out there were salmon.

Mark: 36 here. Looks like quite a haul too.

Tibbetts: Yeah, yeah. Well, it didn't take much. This is a dual-purpose Japanese 77 millimeter gun used for anti-aircraft, anti-personnel, sort of the equivalent of the German 88.

Mark: So this was destroyed in bombing.

Tibbetts: Bombing. Probably, probably, yeah.

And these are some pictures of some guys looking tough with Japanese "knee mortar" on the right and something called the "woodpecker," a Japanese light machine gun in the middle, which were found in connection with the operations up there. The knee mortar was misnamed, it looks like you'd

support it on your thigh and fire the grenade. This was tried by Americans and resulted in broken legs. It occurred to somebody that this was really a base plate attached to the weapon and that you fired it with some sort of trigger mechanism. It was a hell of a weapon, you could fire it rapidly, it was light, carry it around. The shell was big enough to cause a lot of trouble.

Mark: The term “knee mortar” never went away apparently.

Tibbetts: Never went away. Grenade Launcher would be the appropriate term. Early on in Guadalcanal, places like that, people were convinced that this was some sort of— that you supported it with your body to fire it.

Mark: That’s number 30 by the way. Ok, now we’re into the Philippines pictures.

Tibbetts: Ok, I don’t think there’s much sequence here, some of it is sort of after the war. There are a couple that are actual combat shots, this is one, which is pretty bad. That’s Sergeant Brem, Private First Class Manta and me. And that’s Mindanao, I think, and vegetation is sort of a Bacchus. This was some plantation areas, a lot of Japanese around. Kind of scattered, but take a lot of fire.

This is the same general area, poor picture, but try to fire a 60 millimeter mortar, that would be the weapons, Company C weapons.

Mark: This one is 39 here.

Tibbetts: This was on Mindoro and I see that it’s Private First Class Zigler, Tibbetts, I guess I was company commander then. A fellow named Silvers, who brought us the mail, Dozie and Sergeant Earhart, First Sergeant Earhart.

Mark: Just a casual shot around the camp?

Tibbetts: That’s company camp, company tent, yeah we weren’t doing much in Mindoro and we were getting ready to go to Mindanao.

Mark: That’s 40 by the way.

Tibbetts: OK. This is also semi-action. These are Sergeants Brem, Barnes, Private First Class Manta, Black and Lieutenant Weeks, looking active.

Mark: Kind of a lull in the action I guess.

Tibbetts: Yeah. This is— **[tape cuts out and misses a portion of interview]**.

_____ (??) did patrolling up through and after the dropping of the bomb. Company C had a jeep. Kenyon here was a Jeep driver, Lieutenant Hopkins

and myself.

Mark: This one is 45.

Tibbetts: Yeah, that would be, oh number 45. That's probably Mindanao too.

Mark: It was probably 1945 too.

Tibbetts: Probably 1945. Then the kids were always cute. I think I said on this one that the outstanding thing was that the jeep driver was wearing pants. Nobody had much to wear. Girls wore parachute silk, the boys wore GI drawers.

Company jeep, again, with kids that would come around to see.

Mark: Something about Armies and kids, I don't know what it is.

Tibbetts: Food and chewing gum. And all the people were real glad to see children, they were cute, something from home.

This is a guy named Charlie Woo, who is using a company supply room rifle. We ran into him in Mindanao, he just sort of showed up in white clothes and a straw hat. We had no idea who or what, I think maybe, he was representing the interests of Chiang Kai-shek [Chinese political party leader 1928-1975] or something.

Mark: I was going to say, I know the Philippines is a Chinese population.

Tibbetts: He was Chinese, and he attached himself to us, and we welcomed him because he knew the terrain and we were doing combat action in small units up to platoon company, sometimes battalion and he knew where the Japanese were and where they weren't, and this was very helpful. He was very proud, we never let him carry a weapon, but he was proud of this picture. We got him some green clothing because he was much too conspicuous in his white stuff.

Mark: I suppose he was.

Tibbetts: A well educated interesting fellow, with pretty good English and we thought maybe he is somebody who was left there by the Kuomintang [Chinese political party].

Mark: It's kind of an odd story though, the guy just shows up.

Tibbetts: Well, people did show up. This guy showed up too, Mr. Massa. He had studied at Union Theological Seminary and went back to the Philippines, Methodist preacher, his family got divided up, he's got two of his kids here,

wife's on Panay, he said. He just walked in one day and we fed him and he sort of hung around, and we talked about America, built him a church after the war was over, out of bamboo and sheet metal.

Mark: Last but not least.

Tibbetts: We did work before the bomb in and afterwards with Filipino guerilla units in Mindanao, the big island. This is Major Garcia and his wife and her sister and one of her kids, sister's kid I guess. I got a story to tell about that but I won't now, I've written it up. You interested in that sort of thing?

Mark: Absolutely.

Tibbetts: This was, he was a major he had a battalion of guerilla troops which were sort of loosely wrapped, right in the middle of Mindanao. We had a rather small company, my company of soldiers and thousands of Japanese and we spent a lot of time trying to make them surrender. He claimed he knew where they were, but I don't know if he did. Fine fellow.

Mark: He looks very American, or European anyway.

Tibbetts: Well I think he's got a lot of Spanish blood in him.

Mark: Yeah, I looked at him, I would have thought, perhaps, he was American.

Tibbetts: I see what you mean. His wife is – the wife's sister looks more Filipino.

Mark: Well, lets talk about the guerillas in the Philippines, that will lead into the discussion of the peoples of Mindanao anyway. What sort of contact did you have with guerilla groups, and what were their goals, and did you have contact with Filipinos that were collaborators as well? What was your sense of who was collaborating, who was resisting?

Tibbetts: Nobody that we could identify as collaborators. Mindanao was the island with the biggest mix of population, it's big, it has Moros, coming up from Borneo who were willing to fight anybody, and fortunately were fighting the Japanese, and a large civilian Japanese population. It was on this island that we were primarily concerned about being turned in by civilians because we found it difficult to tell the difference between the Japanese, Chinese, Filipino and so on.

On one patrol occasion which I've also written up, we did think that our unit about a platoon size had been marked for attack by a Japanese unit. When it got dark we moved it and sure enough, Japanese came up, and couldn't find us and moved on. No collaborators. We did work with organized guerilla groups in Mindanao, and I think this was after, after the dropping of the bomb.

But bear in mind that Americans were considerably outnumbered on that island and my company was sent back a hundred miles or so to a place named Pikit, all by itself, where we set up a perimeter and were told to put out leaflets to tell the Japanese it was over and to make a stockade and to capture Japanese. This was where I met Major Garcia who had two Christian companies of guerillas who marched very well and two Moro companies who fought very well.

There was a Major named Bustamonte there too who had a PhD in something from Kansas University. The major used Company CG as his personal transportation to visit his outlying units. I would go along with another soldier, both of us armed to the teeth and take Garcia here and there to visit his companies and he seemed to know where the Japanese were, we didn't.

Kabacan and Kidapawan are the names that occur to me in the Mount Apo area. We never did do joint operations with guerillas, that is shoulder to shoulder stuff.

Mark: From your perspective what motivated the Filipinos to resist?

Tibbetts: They didn't like the Japanese and they seemed to like Americans, or at least better than the Japanese.

Mark: There were some parts of Asia where initially the Japanese were sort of greeted as the destructors of imperialism and yet after that the Japanese kind of shot themselves in the foot with their own harsh regime.

Tibbetts: Yeah, kind of that in the Philippines, but the Americans had been around in the Philippines. Sure that was imperialist and so on, but there were the Filipino scouts and units, a lot of interchange and working together and Clark Field, most places weren't as unpleasant I guess. Bar rooms and so forth in those days. I think that there was a feeling that maybe they were Anglos but they shouldn't have been shot up by the Japanese, the Death March, things of this sort, gave sympathy. They really seemed glad to see us. Everywhere.

Mark: Did you get a sense of how harsh the Japanese regime had been on them?

Tibbetts: Everybody was pretty poor, but you could chalk that up just to the level of agriculture there anyhow. Oh, we came upon, again in Mindanao, one guy had been carved up by the Japanese, one Filipino had been tied to a tree and been practiced on, made us pretty upset. I didn't see any brutalization or anything.

Mark: Did you get the sense that perhaps some groups on Mindanao resisted for different reasons.

Tibbetts: The Moros yes. The Moros resisted for their own reasons.

Mark: Which were? From what you could tell anyway.

Tibbetts: Their own culture and their own religion. That goes back to, in the display here, how do you subdue the Moros in connection with the 1903 war there. They were pretty independent.

Mark: Yeah, they're still resisting withdrawal from Manoa at this time.

Tibbetts: Sure are. When the war was over and they were trying to get the Japanese to come in, the Moros, I must have told you this, the Moros would intercept them and chop off their heads.

Mark: No, I would remember that story.

Tibbetts: Pile up the heads at trail junctions or bring them in to the company tent. This discouraged Japanese from surrendering.

Mark: You did tell me that story actually.

Tibbetts: Did I tell you about camping next to their, what was it? Some sort of revival, I think I wrote it up in the material that you've got.

Mark: No it doesn't sound familiar.

Tibbetts: We went to Pikit we got there and we had about a hundred men in the company there was about a thousand Moros, maybe, a half mile away, having some sort of, what appeared to be a religious convention, which was very loud. We were aware of why the 45 had been developed and so on, cautious about messing with the Moros and especially with their women. We had a rather nerve-wracking night wondering what the Moros were talking about, at their religious convention. They pretty much drifted around, we gave them respect when they showed up.

Mark: Was there any sort of animosity between the Moros and the Christian folk?

Tibbetts: I think so.

Mark: Did it spill over into any—

Tibbetts: No. Not in my experience, no overt hostility, but I think there was both ways. Filipinos were nervous about the Moros, the Moros didn't like the Filipinos.

Mark: I was wondering if you could comment on your observations on village life. That's kind of the frontier of the Philippines, it's often very remote, very rural,

and very poor. As a rich American I'd be interested in your impressions as a _____(??).

Tibbetts: Didn't see any village life. You got to a village, it's partly on fire, and there are chickens around and a pig or two, and you had maybe a small fire fight. People are off in the underbrush somewhere and that's village life. You might spend a night in a village, but as far as having any comprehension of village life— not at all. We tended to, if we had time to have any sort of tents or anything, it would not be in a village, it would be away from a village and the village people would come out to see us. I can't remember, I remember names of places but I don't remember any village structure. You come into a place it was because you were in combat. Olongapo was on fire, Subik Bay was on fire, Harao, all these places. I don't mean huge conflagrations, but just that shells or tracer ammunition had started fires here and there. They smelled bad but that was mainly because of either the fire or a few burnt dead people.

Mark: What sort of contact did you have then, with the natives of the island. In the photographs here there are kids and jeeps and the whole business, perhaps you could explain the context of how you met these people.

Tibbetts: They came around. I'm sorry, I don't—

Mark: No, no, it's OK.

Tibbetts: If you were in action, the effort was to resist especially the young people involving themselves because you didn't want them to get hurt. What we saw were people sort of in the train. The combat there was no lines like in Europe, where you could draw on map, battle lines, it was all units of probably not less than a company, but battalion, maybe regiment, would generally go down whatever were called roads or trails and it was by column and then sort of circling the wagons at night kind of thing. Much of it was in the wilderness. The back of plantations or jungle, didn't see villages much. I remember Davao, but I just remember marching through it, turning left and going up into the hills. There was no chance for people to have village life there. If it's a hot area what kind of village life could they have? Then the war's over and we go to Japan.

Mark: I was wondering if you could comment on some of the American attitudes towards the Filipinos.

Tibbetts: I thought it was good. These are our friends. I didn't see much, nor ever heard from Korea talks of gooks and stuff like that.

Mark: Yeah. That's the stereotype of the Vietnam period as well.

Tibbetts: I didn't notice that. Anybody that could help us, we were in favor of.

Children were cute, women were pleasant looking, I don't remember guys tearing after women in any big sense. I was in the hospital for a while and even in that situation—

Mark: I was going to ask— that's interesting actually. I did want to cover some of the post war experiences as well. I was relistening to the tape and you mentioned you were involved in the organizing of veteran protests against the war here in town.

Tibbetts: Vietnam? Yeah.

Mark: I know you've since become a little more embittered about your activities there.

Tibbetts: It didn't take long.

Mark: I'm interested in the organizing part.

Tibbetts: As I remember it, a fellow named Galvin had been a Marine, late in the war and was hostile to the Vietnam War. We were working in the same area in the university, he said there was going to be a meeting in the great hall at the union to organize something called Veterans Against Vietnam. I went to that and maybe, 75-80 veterans there, talking about what could be done, maybe we ought to buy some hats.

Mark: Do you recall the year on this?

Tibbetts: Nope.

Mark: It was pre-Tet though?

Tibbetts: I think so.

Mark: These were mostly World War II veterans that came?

Tibbetts: Well, Korea, and I don't even know if some of them were veterans, if you want to know. In fact there may have been a minority of veterans. There was those who were perhaps more ideological about the war may well have sort of drummed up a bit of trade here to bring out real live veterans. So I went to that, I think I went to a couple of more meetings and I bought a hat and I marched in two marches wearing a hat. I guess we put all of our decorations on the hat to prove, to appear at least, that we were legitimate. I marched with a guy who was a pilot in New Guinea. We got up to the Capital and worked our way up toward the front. The first speaker was from the Spartacus Brigade. The second speaker had something about gay rights, which I wasn't opposed to, but it really didn't seem to have anything to do with Vietnam. It

was that sort of thing that made me feel I was being used to advance a political agenda which I was not wholly in synch with, so I wasn't active anymore.

Mark: Did you think other veterans felt this, the World War II vets, or Korean vets, they felt the same?

Tibbetts: I didn't talk to enough of them and none of my age group, I didn't know all that many people at the University, but there in that church, did not seem interested. They may have been against Vietnam but they weren't about to go out and march. As far as the people I worked with, I came out of the trade unions and I was working with the School for Workers, and our people, our clients were people out of the factories, the trades and so on. With rare exceptions these people were hostile to Anti-Vietnam activities. Some of them were in the National Guard and had come down here during that period, had been peed upon and other such things, which I felt was going too far. Going around Sheboygan, Marinette, La Crosse and so on, if it came up at all it was "What are those stupid bastards doing in Madison?" Many of these guys were veterans, of the hard end of it, Korea, and the Second World War. It was unlikely that they had been Herologists on carriers. They had by-and-large been dog-faces.

Mark: Did you think that their attitudes were more support for the war than hostility towards student protests and things?

Tibbetts: The latter. Hostility toward the protest, not support for the war, except those poor bastards. Why don't they let them do a job? For me, and I'm sure, them, it's the same. You look at those pictures and it could be Leyte, or Luzon, or New Guinea, or Guadalcanal. It was the same sort of ____ (??) unpleasantness with the fire just erupting around you and you think *Jesus*. So I had very, very mixed feelings about protesting against that. Those guys needed all the support they could get, whether you supported the politics, sure, get them home. God, don't make them feel that you think they're a bunch of bastards out there.

Mark: You thought that's what many in the anti-war movement were doing it for? The student movements—

Tibbetts: Whether they intended or not, I felt it was demeaning, what these guys were going through. Demeaning them personally, that they were fools to have allowed themselves to be put in this position. Many of them had enlisted, many had been drafted, many had been drafted because "dot, dot, dot" [...]. Other people had been able to get deferments, so who's doing it for you? It's a real wrench feeling.

Mark: I may have asked this already in a different form, but, of the other veterans, of

your short involvement in this, did you get a sense of which sorts of veterans might be more likely to become involved in this sort of tactic? Were they University guys for example?

Tibbetts: No, no. There were so few— The University people got involved but I didn't know whether they were veterans or not. Go back and read the papers, who the chief professors were helping the students putting some of these demonstrations together or who would be the big speakers at the rallies. There were the Hawks [a person who advocates war or a belligerent national attitude], the Doves [a person who advocates peace or a conciliatory national attitude] and so on. We did, in connection with the School for Workers, during the summers of the Vietnam War, we regularly had groups coming in, autoworkers steel, garment and so on over a period of about ten weeks. Most of the work is bargaining and union administration and so on. We have evenings and we always put on evening programs trying to change the pace a bit and deal with current issues, one of which was Vietnam. So you'd get one Dove from political science and one Hawk from political science or history and have them address the Boilermakers [tradesmen]. This was a sensitive area. Boilermakers were pretty mad at the Doves. Now and then people from the autoworkers, I remember one evening we had about 150 autoworkers and a young man, a young woman, young students came in to address them. The guy had sort of tried to look working class rather than how he would normally, the girl, one of these braless types. Nobody paid any attention to their message, the primary question is why do you dress like this. If you're here to try to teach us something why do you dress in such a fashion that we can't listen to what you say, a lot of shouting at the end about this. Not brutal or anything but, can't you see if you're trying to convince us of your position you ought to sort of make yourself neutral? But here you're making— "We're making a statement with our clothing," Well all right, we hear that statement, but we don't hear your views on Vietnam.

Mark: From your perspective and working with working class peoples I guess, there was no nascent working class protesters of the Vietnam War.

Tibbetts: No, there were legitimate working class and _____(??) people that I didn't think were "intellectuals" who were hostile to the war. This is sort of a plague on both your houses, this is dumb. I think the general feeling was, and with the women too, not just men, the students should count their blessings damn it! We're paying a fare share of this, they ought to behave themselves and support our boys. Maybe it's a bad war, maybe it is, but they're out there getting shot at.

Mark: Did you perhaps get a sense that it was because it was these people's children who were—?

Tibbetts: That too, sure. My boy, my boy, my cousin, my nephew. That of course was

the case, a black, and working class war. The students were privileged.

Mark: I just want to clarify one more point. You're actually taking the step to buy the hat and to march up State Street, as you mentioned you had some mixed feelings about the whole thing. What was it about the war that prompted you to take that step even if just for a couple of months. It must have been quite a decision for you.

Tibbetts: It appeared that this was not a war that the government wanted to win by taking ground as in traditional infantry operations. It appeared to me that there were other possible solutions, and I think I wrote a letter to the paper saying "Why don't you bomb them with refrigerators, because this is something that could be useful." Something like that. They had a hot climate and you can preserve food by bombing people with refrigerators. A few people might get hit directly by a refrigerator, but by-and-large if they landed in a soft area, there's something useful. I felt that there was some, in this set of circumstances; it might have been possible to resolve this without war. Also, I knew a little bit about the history of Ho Chi Minh and the French Colonial occupation and Dien Bien Phu and so on, I don't know what might have been possible to open up discussions with those people, perhaps they had to take a hard line, but in negotiations, things sort of, negotiate settlements. I thought there could be a negotiated arrangement and I wasn't that fond of the people that seemed to be supporting either.

Mark: Yeah. This brings up the issue of communism and its domestic ramifications, You can't negotiate with the Communists, that was the rhetoric of the 50's and the 60's at the time. Was communism much of a factor, in your experience, when it came to the Vietnam War, Ho Chi Minh is a communist?

Tibbetts: No, I didn't think so; I thought he was a nationalist with a strong socialist bend which was necessary for their economy. See again, the labor movement, and growing up in the 30's and so forth, the communists in the labor movement, and there weren't that many, the really hard-line communists, what we learned was that these people wanted to use the unions as a means to an end. That is to create situations, to lose strikes, wave the bloody shirt. It wasn't necessarily bad to lose a strike and have a few people killed because then it proved that you couldn't deal with management. My view was that unions are an end to themselves for the purpose of negotiating terms and conditions of employment, and that this process and bargaining can domesticate management and bring about a better relationship and sure there will be strikes, but it is not to destroy management and I am hoping (building alarm goes off). In my work with unions I have been called a communist and so on, and I had dealt with, in '47 in Allentown, with real communist local unions and learned parliamentary procedure in that fashion, but when it came to this thing, sure there were a few communists around to overthrow the capitalist system, but I saw it as more of a national thing, with Ho Chi Minh.

Mark: Do you think that other people viewed it differently?

Tibbetts: Yeah, I think there was a lack of understanding of what is a communist and what a real communist is and I believe that there were real communists involved in the anti-war protests, but I think a lot of people felt this sort of “Hey, man, this is a sort of radical thing to do.”

Mark: I just had one last thing that I made a note of here and that involves Vietnam vets and the older generation of vets in the protest movement. Did you have any contact with guys coming back from Vietnam?

Tibbetts: In my teaching yes. They didn't identify themselves easily; I had nothing but the very highest regard for these people. I may have mentioned a book, *In Country*, by Bobby Ann Mason, made a movie out of it, it's worth reading. When I first saw that picture of the wall [Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall], its called *Remembrance* or something, _____(??) got it upstairs, I saw it ten years ago somewhere and *wow*, that was quite an impact. Those poor bastards.

Mark: Were they involved in the protest movement at all?

Tibbetts: Who?

Mark: The Vietnam vets.

Tibbetts: That I came in touch with? No, I was always suspicious of these fellows, I may not have given them a chance, but I had a feeling they were kind of being used. They showed up again in the Gulf War when there were efforts being made to turn Madison into a, sort of where deserters could come, live a happy life. They may be fine fellows, but I kind of think they're being used by people for the advancement of a political agenda.

Mark: Those are my questions.

Tibbetts: I got a couple of things to add, not much. You asked about discipline I think, in my position as an officer.

Mark: Chicken shit, did I ask you that question?

Tibbetts: Yeah, I think you did.

Mark: As a dispenser of it what was your definition of it, as a potential dispenser.

Tibbetts: I was thinking of my discipline from my personal standpoint and dealing with recalcitrant troops and I think I cited a couple of examples. I have three more.

One involved a private named Brown, who in a combat situation went to sleep on guard, well; this is serious, mighty serious. It was unfortunately, generally known, and he was seized and removed from the company. I made inquiries and found that Brown could not read or write and was of borderline intelligence and I made an effort to pull him out of the court martial system and kept him in the company, and this was approved of by his colleagues. The other is something I'm still sorry about. One of the great pleasures of being a commanding officer is recognizing merit, having guys that come up private, show some capacity of soldiers and may reach a bit for response, being able to make non-commissioned officers. You could just write home "sergeant so and so," and this was a pleasure, giving a guy a chance to exercise some of his capacities and thinking about how nice he leaves as a private, he goes home as a staff sergeant or something, that's going to look good—if he gets home. This relates to the one time I broke a guy from sergeant to private, a guy named Kinser. The war was technically over; we were at Pikit, trying to capture Japanese with Moros around and there was a large lump of earth there and I kept a squad up there and Sergeant Kinser on this night was in charge and he got drunk. We were at risk, I felt, he was in a key position, and I was known among people there and I pulled his stripes. He was just about ready to go home so he went home a private. I felt bad about that. He had been a good soldier up to this point, but I felt I had to do something, so I still feel sorry about Sergeant Kinser.

Another kind of amusing thing, this was probably Mindanao, staging for what we felt was the invasion of Japan. I got a call from the regimental commander to report post-haste to headquarters, I did that. "Lieutenant Tibbetts, Commander Company C 34th infantry reporting as ordered," and there standing was a soldier that I'd been with through all through this stuff, named Dozie from Milwaukee, who wrote regularly to his mother. He was standing there with his pants leg, outside his leggin, and Colonel Wheeler said "Is this your soldier?" and I said "yeah, it's Private Dozie." He said, "Well he was caught downtown with his pants leg outside his leggin." We're in garrison now, so to speak, and that won't do. So he said, "Lieutenant, tee off on Private Dozie." [I said] "Yes sir, (about face) come on Dozie." Now, he didn't mean it, Colonel Wheeler didn't mean it, I didn't mean it, Dozie was a simple soul. So I said "Well, what I'd better do?" he said I'll work in the kitchen, I said, "OK."

Mark: What's "tee-off," I don't know this term.

Tibbetts: Well, It's like golf in a sense, I guess it came from that. You put the ball on the tee and you whack it, and to "tee-off" on somebody means to jump on them. I don't have any big recollections, but these, Brown and Kinser and Dozie. I called Dozie up about ten years after the war he was over in Milwaukee living with his mother; talk about a mouse-like little fellow, feeling so embarrassed about that. That's about all really.

Mark: I can't remember if we discussed drinking.

Tibbetts: In garrison in the states, some guys would do that, I didn't notice it much. Drunken fellows, _____(??) fed guys, city boys. Overseas now and then, Kinser got drunk, he must have found something. No drunken orgies.

Mark: No Hawkeye Pierce and the still and the tent and the whole business?

Tibbetts: They're in one place. If you're in an infantry unit you keep moving, there isn't time to put up a still, there isn't time to make mash or to set it up and let it fester. In the Navy you got a boat to work with and the hospital, well, we did have access now and then, come to think of it, 190 proof medicinal alcohol when we were trying to take Japanese prisoners. We had a medical captain with us, with the company, who in his kit had some of this stuff. He controlled the pace of dispensation.

Mark: Sounds like you had to be pretty hard up to drink that anyway.

Tibbetts: We were issued beer on occasion, three cans. Now, a certain amount of trading went on. My recollection is that I sequestered my three cans, went to the nearest stream, make sure nobody was around, and then put them in the stream to cool off. Then recovered them and drank them all. 3.2 beers doesn't go very far.

Mark: No, I'm sure it doesn't.

Tibbetts: I don't know. This sort of thing makes you realize that most of your life is really just a footnote to what was going on then.

Mark: Well, the big events—

Tibbetts: Being there you hardly believe in the rest of your life at all. It's all just now and afterwards it's as though that was it and the rest of your life is just sort of a footnote.

Mark: Well, the UW has an oral history program and they would ask you question after question about your work there and World War II would only come up briefly. It depends on who you're talking to. It is true that in great events like this they tend to get a lot of attention and people will ask questions about that, perhaps at the detriment other kinds of things.

Tibbetts: Well, I don't know about spirits or anything, but I'm looking forward to seeing the folks later on in the great, great arena of the sky.

Mark: Let's hope you aren't going to go there too soon. Thanks again for stopping

in.

Tibbetts: All right.

[End of Interview]