

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
ROBERT E. TIERNEY  
4<sup>th</sup> Division, Marine Corps, World War II  
2005

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**Tierney, Robert E.,** (1925-). Oral History Interview, 2005.

User Copy: 2 sound cassette (ca. 93 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 2 sound cassette (ca. 93 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

CD Recording: 1 compact disc (ca. 93 min.); edited interview.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

**Abstract:**

Robert Tierney, a Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War II service in the Pacific with the 24<sup>th</sup> Regiment, 4<sup>th</sup> Division of the Marine Corps. Tierney reflects on why he chose to volunteer with the Marine Corps and touches on boot camp in San Diego. He describes the formation of the division at Camp Pendleton (California), the role of his unit in A Company, and specializing in knocking out pillboxes and blockhouses. Tierney highlights the close friendships developed in his unit as a result of so much training. Shipped directly to the Marshall Islands, he talks about taking out fifty-four blockhouses on Namur, an island in the Kwajalein atoll. He recalls a couple coincidental meetings with people from home and describes the rest camp and sugar cane fields at Maui (Hawaii). Tierney recalls hearing news of D-Day while hundreds of ships were assembling at Bikini Island. He describes landing on Saipan, combat conditions, and taking cover in foxholes. He reveals that the first night they were ordered not to fire and give away their position, and he explains that a good friend was killed by a grenade as an indirect result. Tierney relates how, while scouting, two men on both sides of him were killed by a machine gun and the difficulty of losing close friends. He describes securing the island, giving water to Japanese civilians, and then being shot through his back and arm. Evacuated to a hospital ship, he reports his legs developed osteomyelitis, a bone infection, and Tierney declares he was lucky to receive some of the first penicillin supplies. He talks about having thirty-three surgeries over four years in several different Navy hospitals and, while at a hospital on New Caledonia (Australia), having his purple heart presented by Bob Hope. While at Great Lakes Naval Hospital, he speaks of the arrival of troops who had been prisoners of war in Japan and risking court-martial to allow them off and on the base without permission. Tierney discusses getting into the VA office in Wausau (Wisconsin) and how much payment he received from them.

Interviewed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2005.

Transcribed by Kevin Axe, 2009.

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2009.

**Interview Transcript:**

- John: Today is March 31, 2005, and this is John Driscoll, and I am a volunteer with the Wisconsin Veterans Museum Archives. And this is an oral history interview with Bob Tierney, of Wausau, Wisconsin. Bob is a veteran of the United States Marine Corps, the 4th Division, in World War II. Bob, thanks a lot for coming down from Wausau and agreeing to the interview.
- Robert: You are very welcome.
- John: Why don't we start at the beginning? When and where were you born?
- Robert: I was born in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, in the Depression era.
- John: When? When was your birthday?
- Robert: Oh, 1925.
- John: Okay.
- Robert: My father went to the University of Wisconsin Dairy School, and became a licensed butter maker in the state of Wisconsin.
- John: Okay. This is interesting.
- Robert: He had one of his professors was Mr. Babcock.
- John: Yeah, okay.
- Robert: He was famous for the Babcock milk tester.
- John: Yeah. Yeah. How about brothers or sisters?
- Robert: Oh, I had five sisters and five brothers.
- John: Oh, big family.
- Robert: I was the oldest.
- John: You were the oldest. Okay.
- Robert: And the Depression came along and the banker in Menominee, Wisconsin, was a very good friend of my dad, and he was foreclosing on a farm west of Menominee. And so they asked him, they said, "Ed, would you take over the farm?" And so he says, you will rent it from me on shares. If you

make some money on it, okay. If you don't, we won't charge you. You know, there was a lot of barter deals done in those days. And so dad started the Hudson Road Dairy in Menominee, Wisconsin, and that was prior to having refrigerators. So we had two of these one-horse milk wagons with the big wheels on them, and one horse pulling them. And we delivered milk every day to every house except on Sunday. And then we built a milk house on this farm and we had about fifty Guernsey cows, which was a large herd. And, of course, we still milked them by hand. And then we got a cream separator and we used to make our own cottage cheese and other dairy products from the milk besides just selling the milk. We'd sell the cream and stuff like that. And Saturday was always the day that people in town got out their little ice cream machine and they'd make ice cream. Friday was always a good day for the cream business. It went pretty well. Then, in 1934, well, we had three years in drought, very severe drought. But in 1934, the drought completely wiped out the crops. And Roosevelt had started what they called the New Deal program. And so there were so many farmers going out of business there was a danger of the food supply in this country at that time. So we were able to borrow money from the government to buy hay for the cattle for that winter. Come spring, and there wasn't enough money there to pay back the government, but Highway 29 was being improved with the WPA. And so they said, you can work off your hay bill by furnishing horses and wagons to haul gravel to Highway 29.

John: I've never heard of that. That's great.

Robert: We had two hired men at that time and these were people that just come walking down the road and turned in and asked if they could have a job. And they actually, these guys worked on an average fourteen hour days. For \$1 a day plus board and room. And they were very happy to get that. Mother was a good cook, so that helped.

John: Yeah. Yeah. What about schooling?

Robert: Schooling. I went to school at St. Mary's parochial school in Menominee for three years, then I went to the Hudson Road Public School for two years. But due to selling the farm and moving, I went to nine schools in twelve years. And I actually ended up in Appleton, Wisconsin, when I went into the Marine Corps. They had a deal then, if you were in the upper fifty percent of your class and you enlisted in the Marine Corps, on your last, or any branch of the service, in your last half of your senior year, you automatically get your diploma. So I enlisted on February 25, 1943. But we moved around a lot. We moved from Menominee and sold the farm, and then dad said, "Well, I think I'll try the hardware business." So he bought a Gamble Skogmo (?) Store. Gamble used to be quite well known back in those days.

- John: Okay. What was the other name? Gamble?
- Robert: It was Gamble Skogmo. Two guys. Then from there he decided he wanted to get back in the dairy business again, so then there was an opening at Augusta, Wisconsin. For butter making. So we moved to Augusta and from there, the business there wasn't run the way he thought it should be run. There was an opening for a manager at the Waupaca Co-op Creamery. So we moved to Waupaca when he got that job, and then from Waupaca, the area around there is mostly lakes and woods. And there wasn't a lot of potential for milk production. So a guy by the name of Mr. George Ruppel, from Shawano, Wisconsin, approached him one day. I was a little small guy. We had these big 5,000 gallon milk tanks. I was the only one small enough to crawl in the hole and wash the insides of the tanks.
- John: Okay.
- Robert: And then George came and I sat down in the office while they were talking, and he said, "Ed, why don't we merge these two here?" He said, "I've already talked to Mr. Erdman, from Iola. And we'll form Consolidated Badger Co-op." And that was the beginning of about three hundred mergers. And then during the war, well, actually, dad moved, we moved to Appleton, and then the Consolidated Badger Group bought the cheese factory at Birnamwood, Wisconsin, right out of Wausau. And out of that during the war, you couldn't build a new building. Everything was frozen as far as construction or anything went. So after the war, George says to him, "Ed, would you like to, we're going to build a new plant at Wittenberg, would you like to be manager of that?" "No," he said, "I'd rather get back closer to the Appleton area. I really liked it there." So then they bought a Standard Brands plant at Seymour, Wisconsin. And so he was at Seymour until he passed away.
- John: I'll be darned. That is quite a story.
- Robert: Yeah. But then, after the war, then they had a contest among the farmer patrons for a name for the company. And a woman came up with the name Morning Glory.
- John: Oh, okay.
- Robert: So that is when they started Morning Glory, see.
- John: Well, let me ask a question I ask everybody. Do you remember Pearl Harbor Day?

Robert: Oh, definitely.

John: What was happening?

Robert: We were living in Waupaca. Dad was over in Minnesota visiting his step-mother. And we were sitting down to dinner and had the radio on, in Waupaca. And the announcement came over. And that was the day I decided I was going to enter the Marine Corps. I was a junior at high school in Waupaca.

John: Okay. Then let me ask another question. Why the Marine Corps?

Robert: I don't know. I just had it in my mind that was what I wanted to do.

John: Okay. I did four years in the Marine Corps.

Robert: I was, well, my favorite subject in school was always history, and I'd studied a lot about the Marine Corps and I knew one fellow who was in the Marine Corps. And so I just, it pretty much was a mind set that I had at that time. And then when I got to Appleton High School, there were eight of us guys used to get out of school at 2:30 in the afternoon. We all worked at the Service Bakery in Appleton. It was a bakery that had about fifty trucks and they covered the area and they went house to house and small stores and things like that. And I kept talking it up about joining the Marine Corps and probably all eight of us joined the Marine Corps together.

John: You went in in February of '43?

Robert: February 25th, of '43. We went to Green Bay and the recruiting officer.

John: Then where did you do your basic, your boot?

Robert: They sent us to San Diego.

John: San Diego. I went through advanced electronics at San Diego in 1955. A little after your time. Okay. Well, what about boot camp?

Robert: Boot camp wasn't, well, having been a farm boy and having moved around, and everything like that, I really didn't mind boot camp at all. We had conditions that were, they had a big field there, a black-topped field where they practiced marching and close order drill and all that kind of stuff. And then they didn't have buildings enough for us, so all along the west side of the field they set up these six-man tents. And we stayed in these tents for eight weeks.

John: And then, after San Diego, where did you go?

Robert: Well, for a couple weeks, we went to Camp Elliot. And there we, for rifle range. Having been on the farm, I practically lived with a .22. I was pretty good. Expert, over there. Then from there, we went back and finished up boot camp, and then it was about the first, sometime in May when I got out of boot camp, and we went in the back of Camp Elliot, and they said they were drawing up a list, and they said, "Well, tonight, you are going to leave with a group going to Bougainville for the 3rd Marine Division." And I said, "Well, there is one little problem. When I signed up, they promised me a ten day leave at home first before I went overseas." So the captain who was in charge there said you go talk to the chaplain. And he got the record out and he said, "You're right. Go." An hour later, I was on my way back to Birnamwood, Wisconsin, where my folks had moved. So I was three and a half days on the train going to Birnamwood, three and a half days back, and I spent three days at home.

John: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Robert: But, then, when I got back from Birnamwood, that is when they were just starting, that was in June. First part of June, '43. And they were just starting for form the 4th Marine Division at Camp Pendleton, California. It was a brand new camp at that time. So then they transferred us to Pendleton and then the 23rd Regiment was from Parris Island, and the Camp LeJeune area. And they were coming across the country on troops trains, and then the 25th Regiment was being transferred, came through the Panama Canal and came around by ship. So it was about in July when all three regiments got together and we started to take shape. And I think eventually we had somewhere about 18,000 men in the division. But they called it a reinforced division at that time, and the reinforced division included the Amtrak's and other areas that were attached. So they said by the time we left for overseas, there was about 21,000 or 22,000. But back, then in September, we were supposed to go overseas, and all of a sudden they pulled us all back for retraining. And that was right after Tarawa. They had a bad experience at Tarawa.

John: Yeah. Yeah.

Robert: Well, they said, we don't want any more Tarawas. So they reformed our companies to there was four companies. I was in A Company, but there was four platoons. And then the first platoon, the thirteen guys in that squad were pulled out and were made a special unit, and the others were regular infantry. And they would move up in the battle situation, and the special unit would always be in reserve until they come to a pillbox or blockhouses or something that the infantry would have too big a loss if they went after them. So then they set up a deal where the first man in the

squad was, well, he was our squad leader. Guy's name was Sergeant Freihoff, from Ohio.

John: Any idea how to spell that?

Robert: But he was an older Marine who had been in for a while and had been to China with the Boxer Rebellion group.

John: Oh, wow, he had been in a while.

Robert: Well, we had a couple of guys. We had a gunnery sergeant that was from the Boxer Rebellion. And these guys were heavy drinkers. When they went on liberty, they'd give her hell. You know, tough as nails. But this Freihoff and I got along especially good. We were real buddies. He always called me, he'd call me, "Matey." It was always Matey. And so then the first guy after him would be a guy that carried what they called Bangalore torpedoes.

John: Yep.

Robert: And wire cutters. And then I was the next guy, with my Browning Automatic Rifle. And my job was to keep firing at the apertures in the blockhouses, and keep them from firing back. And then the next guy was the demolition man, and right next to him was the flame thrower guy. And so we worked as a team. We practiced and practiced. And had it down pretty good. So we knocked out a lot of blockhouses.

John: Okay. Where did you ship out from the States from? San Diego?

Robert: San Diego.

John: To where?

Robert: Directly from the States to the Marshall Islands. We were the only division that ever left the States without going through a base in between to an enemy island, or to enemy land. Otherwise, they always had a base in between. But we were the only division that ever, but see, they kept us, then, until we didn't ship out until January, about the 6th of January in 1944. So we got quite a bit of, we were one of the longest trained divisions to ever leave the States. And as a result, well, you know, you form a lot of friendships.

John: Sure.

Robert: And you're buddy-buddy. You work closely together. Your timing is good, and everything. So we were very successful. And there were fifty-



four blockhouses on the island of Namur, and when we took care of Roi and Namur Islands in a matter of about thirty-six hours.

John: Wow.

Robert: We killed 7,000 Japanese. And our main loss on Namur was just as we landed, our Higgins boat, we landed in a Higgins boat, and the ramp was just going to come down and the unit that landed next to us, just before us, demolition man threw a satchel charge into a big cement building there, not knowing that there were approximately fifty Japanese torpedoes in there for submarines. I got pictures of that in the boat. But they said it was the largest explosion that the Marines had run across. In the end, we had more casualties from that explosion than we did from the Japs themselves. That was kind of a rude awakening. You hit the beach and something like that happens and, you know, it kind of brings you to your senses.

John: Oh, yeah.

Robert: But our own, our company, we only had one or two casualties, and they weren't serious. We had so much concrete and debris coming down. It got just as dark as night. And well, I'll show you pictures after a while. And that was the 24th Regiment, and we took Namur. And the 23rd Regiment took the air field that was on Roi. And they were connected by a causeway. And Roi was, the total island, from one ridge to the next ridge, was an airfield. There was no trees on it. It was strictly an air field. And I think the purpose for taking the island of Roi and Namur, this was in the Kwajalein Atoll, it was that the planes from Roi could hit the island of Truk. And Truk was a known stronghold.

John: Big, big base.

Robert: And by the continuous bombing we were able to do from Roi, they never had to make a landing at Truk.

John: They just by-passed it.

Robert: And my brother Mike was with the Navy for thirty-some years. And Mike was out in Guam. He was a bacteriologist. And he was out in Guam not too long ago, a couple of years ago. And they sent him down to Truk for a while. They got a different name for it now. But he was saying all this debris is still there. That was one island they were able to by-pass because of taking another island. And then on the Kwajalein Atoll was a big circle. You know how that goes. And in the center was, I don't know how many miles, sixty or seventy miles long. About twenty, twenty-five miles wide. Big atoll. Down at the bottom of the island of Kwajalein, but there were a few Japanese on it, but not a major base. And the 27th Army Division

landed there and took that island. So after I got out of the service, met my wife and her niece had a boyfriend by the name of Milton Minn, and come to find out Milt was with the 27th, and he was in the Marshall Islands there. Well, he was also on Saipan with me. Well, we never knew each other until we got back. One of those coincidences.

John: Yeah.

Robert: And then another coincidence that I had was on the island of, well, just before we left the United States, I decided I was going to, it was Christmas Eve, I decided I was going to make a phone call home to Birnamwood. Well, I had never been to Birnamwood because the folks moved there after I left for the service. And in those days the telephone lines were just notoriously busy. So I placed a call at 8:00 on the 24th in the morning. And about 7:00 the following morning, the operator says, "You know, I think you waited long enough. I am going to shut down everybody else and put your call through." And then I got back to the barracks and there was a guy transferred in as a replacement to bring us up to quota because we were shipping out the next day. And a guy by the name of Herbie Morris. And, you know, the guys were all ribbing me, you know, "Where in the world to you turn up?" You know, all that business. I said, "A little town by the name of Birnamwood." And this kid says, "Where did you say?" He says, "That's where I'm from."

**[End of Side A of Tape 1.]**

John: Okay, there we are. This is Side 2 of Tape 1. So, after Kwajalein?

Robert: Well, after Kwajalein, then they sent us back to a rest camp at Maui, in the Hawaiian Islands. And that was really quite a change, you know, from the island to Maui. That was before the United States, before it was a state.

John: Yeah, okay.

Robert: The people there were just terrific. On the island of Maui at that time they were quite poor. Maui is about eighty percent sugar cane and pineapple. And sugar cane fields that they raise there, they told me it was unbelievable, like a hundred tons per acre. Just, yeah. In fact, they didn't use, they built railroad tracks and used small trains for hauling it out because of the weight. What they did there, before they harvested the sugar cane fields, they'd light them on fire.

John: Okay, I've heard of that.

Robert: And the leaves on this sugar cane would just burn like a big forest fire, you know. And the thing there, they told us, the fire would seal the juice at

the, if they cut the leaves off, they'd lose a lot of the juice, but the fire would seal it.

John: Okay.

Robert: And then we run across the same thing on Saipan. Saipan was a good portion of that was sugar cane. In fact, our landing was right at the town called Charon-kanoa (?), right next to a big sugar cane – that was our, that was the 4th Division's landing area. And see, when we landed on Saipan, there was the 2nd Marine Division and the 4th Marine Division, and the 27th Army Division. And so, well, I can explain that later to you, but when we went back to Maui, then we had a few guys leave. We lost very few men on the Marshalls but we did get some replacements. And then the higher-ups knew the conditions we were going to go to next. Everything was kept pretty secret. And so we trained in the sugar cane fields on Maui. And then we went to, we took about, oh, retraining took about from February, well, it was about the middle of February to the middle of May. And then they took us to Pearl Harbor to assemble. And they assembled what they called Task Force 58, which was under Admiral Spruance. And the 25th of May they had a very bad accident there with an LST. Six of them blew up. They had 300 and some casualties. A welder, there were different stories about it. Most of the Marines that were involved on those ships were in port, in Pearl Harbor, Honolulu, on liberty, so it was mostly civilian construction people were the losses there. But that was one terrific – it was almost like December 7th.

John: Yeah. Yeah.

Robert: And they never, that was always kept very secret.

John: I have never heard of it.

Robert: Well, that is why. One of the latest American Legion, or VFW magazines, has quite a story about it just recently. But didn't hold us up. We left on the 29th of May for the Marshall Islands and our point of assembly was on Bikini Island.

John: Oh, okay.

Robert: But that was, I was doing guard duty on the top deck of the ship. I don't know what good it was doing to do guard duty there, but there were over 800 ships in the fleet. And the troop ships were tucked in the middle. We had five battleships. I don't know how many cruisers. And they had over twenty aircraft carriers. And all these battleships were around us, and then the supply ships and tankers and all of that stuff. But according to the write-up that I saw later, there were over 800 ships.

John: Man, that is hard to imagine.

Robert: And the thing that really surprised me the most, we left on the 29th of May and we got to Bikini Island about the 9th of June, and on the 6th of June is when they announced to us that the landings were being made in France. D-Day.

John: Sure, that was the same week.

Robert: And to somebody eighteen years old at the time, you are on deck and you see 800 ships out here, and then you hear about the size of the operation they were doing in France, and you think, how did they do that? The logistics must have been something else. So we were all aboard ship when we heard about the landing in France. And we assembled at Bikini, and on the 9th of June, we left Bikini Island for Saipan. Well, as soon as we got out into open waters after we left Bikini, well, they gave us maps and started instructions on the beaches and all that kind of stuff. And we spent from the 9th of June until the 15th getting ready for the landing. The navy pulled off a great one there, too, because they, our 24th Regiment was the reserve regiment, of the 4th Division at that time. And we arrived over the northern end of Saipan about 2:00 in the morning of June 15th. And so they put the ropes down over the side and you go down into the Higgins boats and we made all the noise we could. They said, don't hesitate. They want the Japs to know we are there. And we spent about two hours rendezvousing and then all of a sudden about six in the morning, we start heading in. Well, all this time we were being observed by the Japanese and they are quickly moving their equipment, howitzers and all this stuff, and adjusting everything on Mount Tapachio (?) to take care of the north end of the island. And when we got to within about a thousand yards of the shore, where the Japanese shells were starting to hit in the water, we made a U-turn and went back to our ships. In the meantime, about that same time, in the meantime, the 2nd and the 23rd Regiment and the 25th Regiment of the 4th Division, with the 2nd Division, were all landing in the south, around Kanoa (?) and Garapan.

John: Okay.

Robert: Garapan was the capital. But when the first wave of the guys that hit the beach didn't have any small arms fire at the time at all. It worked out very well. But it didn't take the Japanese long. They had a lot of artillery on Mount Tapachio and another ridge line that was on railroad tracks going back into caves, like that. And they did lay down that night and the next day, they laid down a tremendous barrage. And the 4th Division suffered 2,000 casualties in little over about thirty-six hours. And I don't know what the 2nd Division had. But then in the middle of the night they

brought in the 27th Army Division, and took cover between our two 2nd and 4th Division. And in my write-up there, we had moved up through other units, and we were about a couple hundred yards inland. And in our foxholes, we dug two-man foxholes. We'd have one here, and one here, and one here. And back there fifteen yards behind us, one here and one here, offsetting like a checker board.

John: Okay.

Robert: And I was in one of the forward foxholes with a friend of mine, and along about one o'clock in the morning, I hear a scuffle in the back. We were ordered not to fire our rifles if we didn't have to, because we didn't want to give our position away. And all of a sudden I heard this scuffle. And we had a guy from Staten Island, New York. We called him Staten Ivy. He was a character. In fact, I even got some letters from him. But I said, "Ivy, you okay?" "I'm okay, Bob," he said. About an hour later, the same thing. "Hey, Ivy, you okay?" "I'm okay." The next morning, he had two dead Japs laying next to his foxhole. He happened to be right on the path where they were trying to get by-past him, trying to get back to their places. He killed them with his bare hands. But we worked really good as a team. We had a lot of training and it worked out for the best. But the following night, there was one night that bothered me ever since. Ever since we had everything in there. We were moving out and there was a large ridge, and there was like a cliff, a two hundred foot cliff. And there were caves and stuff in it, and we thought for sure we were going to have a real battle getting up that cliff. Well, our company moved up and luckily where we moved up, here was a path going up this cliff, and apparently the Japs had left it open and so we were able to go up that cliff and get to the top. And at the top there was kind of a rolling hill at the top. And there was about of us left in our company at that time out of two hundred and fifty. And we dug in. Captain says, "Whatever you do, don't fire your rifle at any single or small group. We don't want to give our position away." With that cliff behind us, we were in a very precarious position. And so along about twelve-thirty or midnight, or right in that time, here comes a Jap up, and he was silhouetted against the sky. And I could see him. And they used hand grenades like the Germans where they had the plunger in them, and they hit them against their helmet or something before they would throw them. And this guy was maybe twenty yards from me. And I had a BAR. I could have easily knocked him off. He hit his grenade on his helmet and tossed it in our general direction. And I heard it go off. Then he left. I said, that's good. And about a few minutes later I heard them calling for a corpsman. And as luck would have it, it landed right in a foxhole. One of my very best friends. Blew his leg off. The corpsman worked on that. They put ponchos over it so the light wouldn't show. And the corpsman worked on him all night but he died in the morning.

John: That's tough.

Robert: You know, it's one of those things that you kind of remember because I had it in my power to take the guy out, you know. We had orders. You follow orders, regardless, you know. And that has always been a hard thing to live down, you know.

John: Yeah. Yeah.

Robert: Then a couple days later we went along, we took along the top part of Oswego (?) Airfield, the main airfield there. We took that and we were waiting for the other, there was what they called Magazine Bay, on Saipan, just past Oswego Airfield. And we were up close to this bay. And the idea was that we were supposed to stop and wait for the other units to catch up. And then they were going to make a kind of a right turn and then our Division was supposed to go on the west side of Saipan from the south to the north. But some of the other units got held up and we had to wait about half a day for them. Well, in the meantime, where the marching guns, someplace back in the woods that had a trajectory that he couldn't hit us but he was firing over the top, a nuisance. And so we said, well, we got to get rid of him before we could go north, so I and two other guys were sent out as scouts to find out where he was. And we found out where he was and we were coming back to report to the captain. And we were within about, oh, I'd say twenty yards of being back and we were walking, there was a sugar cane field there. And one guy was here and I was in the middle and the other guy was here. And the machine gun was firing from up in this area. And this was another different machine gun, and he let go with a couple of bursts. And he killed the guys on both sides of me, and I didn't get a scratch.

John: Oh, man. Oh, wow.

Robert: I hit the deck. And then I realized he couldn't hit me when I was down low. And he hit both these guys in the head and killed them. So then I crawled out of there and I got a corpsman over, but he said those, nothing he could do for them. But that was kind of a shattering experience, too.

John: Sure. Sure.

Robert: That was one thing about our division that was different than a lot of others in that we had so much time in training together.

John: Okay. You got to know each other.

Robert: We'd go to L. A. on weekends, and we got to be close friends, you know. And to lose your close friends like that, it is hard to bring home. That was

a bad experience. Then after that we moved clear up to the other end of the island in the next eighteen days, I guess it took us to get to the northern end of the island. Then we were told we were clear up on top of the island. The island sloped off both ways. There was a mountain and there was a ridge, and we were on top of this ridge, and we were working our way down to the ocean and they told us that our main aim then was to try and stop the civilians from throwing their kids off these cliffs, and the women were jumping in after them.

John: Oh, wow.

Robert: The Japanese had them so brain-washed about the horrible things we were going to do to them, you know. And so we were moving down toward the beach, and when we got down by the beach, that is when we had these Navajo people on the radio there, you know. And by that time, there was just 252 of us. There was only seventeen of us left in the company.

John: Oh, my God. Oh, wow.

Robert: And then this Navajo he comes up, and he says, "The island is now officially declared secured." This was on July 8, about 4:30 in the afternoon. And twenty minutes later I got hit.

John: Oh.

Robert: But my good friend, Al Perry, he is the one that wrote that other, him and another guy realized what was happening and they got ahold of one of the company interpreters, and they used the bullhorn. And so he went back to our supply jeep and got two five gallon cans of water and he went up there and he said pretty soon. He used these little two ounce cups from our K-rations to distribute the water. Ten gallons of water. And he said he had a line of people coming out, the people were so desperate for water.

John: Civilians?

Robert: Civilians. Yeah. And once they seen we were distributing water to them, ten gallons wasn't enough. But what him and the other guys did, they more or less than anything else they could have done. I just talked to him night before last. We talk back and forth. He's from Clearwater, Florida.

John: You said you got hit.

Robert: I got shot. Actually, I got shot in the back. I was in position, I was holding my BAR like this and it went through between my ribs and took out three and a half inches of bone in my arm. But the main problem was after that, there was such a shortage of doctors, for one thing. And another thing was

that I developed what they call osteomyelitis in my legs, bone infection. And I was lucky in that I was able to get the first penicillin that came out of the U. S. S. *Samaritan*, hospital ship. Came out there and they had some of the first supplies of penicillin that were made at that time. And so I was lucky to get penicillin and that helped. And once they evacuated me to a hospital ship, then I was scheduled for surgery. I went aboard the hospital ship about nine o'clock in the morning, the next day, the following morning. And about two o'clock in the morning following that is when I was scheduled for surgery. These doctors worked round the clock. The doctor that worked on me had worked seventy-two hours.

John: Man. That is something else.

Robert: There is another coincidence there. He seen my name was Tierney. And he says, "Oh, are you from Appleton?" He says, "I know your family."

John: That's great.

Robert: So, a small world. But then I went in to surgery to have my arm amputated. And the next morning after the anesthetic wore off, I thought, gee, I still got my arm. That was a surprise, you know. It took me over, well, it was almost four years because of the osteomyelitis and that before I finally got out of the hospital.

John: Wow.

Robert: I was in seven different navy hospitals.

John: Do you have full use of the arm now?

Robert: No, not of the left arm. And then when we left Saipan, we had so many casualties in the hospital in Hawaii and the West Coast that they sent our ship down to Noumea, New Caledonia, right off the coast of Australia. And when the campaigns down there for the different islands and stuff was going on, and the Navy was just losing so many ships to the Japanese, they build two hospitals on New Caledonia, and we were there about a week. And Bob Hope and his USO group came through. And it just happened that was the day the paperwork came through for my Purple Heart. And the captain we had for a doctor there, he said to Bob Hope, Bob Hope was walking down the aisle there, and there was about forty guys to a ward, and he said, "Oh, I got one here the papers just came through for a Purple Heart. You want to present it?" So Bob Hope presented my Purple Heart.

John: Oh, that's great!



Robert: But, he was great, by the way. He came to our, put on USO shows twice on Maui. Twice at boot camp and five different times.

John: I'm going to pop another one in here.

**[End of Side B of Tape 1.]**

Robert: A word in here, he's thirty-nine years old but he isn't married yet. You know. And of course, he has a wonderful girl friend.

John: I had a very close family friend that worked for the Republican Senate Caucus.

Robert: Well, Mike knew him, I'm sure, because Mike was the head of the Senate Democratic Caucus, and him and the guys from the Republican, they got together and exchanged information.

John: Sure.

Robert: And I know quite a few of them. I'm told the newspaper got, a couple of different groups got in there and while they are supported by the William T. Evjue Foundation, and they got to justify their, so we done away with the caucus and all the newspapers are complaining they don't have a good source for information.

John: You ought to be careful what you ask for. You might get it. Yeah. Well, then, when did you come back to the States?

Robert: Well, then they sent a large ship to pick us up. But first they went to Australia and they picked up about 200 brides of American servicemen that had gotten married in Australia. War brides. And they went to the Solomon Islands and picked up three battalions of Sea Bees, which was construction battalions in the Navy. They were maintaining airfields and all that kind of stuff.

John: Yes.

Robert: Well, this was far enough out of the operation realm of the Japanese now that they didn't need all these people down there for all that maintenance. So the three battalions of Sea Bees were put on the ship, plus the war brides, and there was about two hundred of us or three hundred of us that were casualties from Saipan. And we didn't have enough escort ships to escort us across the Pacific, so we took the southern route down there. Took fourteen days to go from New Caledonia to, they said they were out of range of what the Japanese were able to do with submarines. That was something.

- John: Then when you got back to the States, you were still in the hospital?
- Robert: Oh, yeah. I had that one surgery aboard the hospital ship. I had a minor surgery in the MASH hospital there on Saipan. And that was July 8th. July 9th, in this country, you know, because of the Date Line. And then I, let's see. Then I went from there to the island down there, to that fleet hospital, and from the fleet hospital they took us to Oakland Naval Hospital, in Oakland. Well, they were jammed to the rafters there, so they sent a special train up and they took us by train from Oakland down to San Diego. And then I spent from late September until January in San Diego. And then there was another invasion or two in the Pacific and I just said to one doctor, "You guys are so overloaded here. I'm never going to be able to get out of here." So he said, "We're going to transfer you to Great Lakes Naval Hospital. You'll be close to home." And so I transferred to Great Lakes, and I spent a total of eighteen months there. I had eleven surgeries there.
- John: Oh, wow.
- Robert: I had thirty-three surgeries in naval hospitals altogether.
- John: That's remarkable! Wow.
- Robert: But Great Lakes, it got to be the same point. I was at Great Lakes, well, then they put me on, and when I was able to, then I was put on part-time duty, either flag duty or most of the time it was as a gate guard. All the Marines that were there were guards for the gate. So I was on gate duty, I was on gate duty on VJ-Day. So when we heard it was VJ-Day, there was about five of us Marines on the gate there, we just let everybody go. "Well, here's my pass." "Forget the pass, just go!" It was one big celebration. And I took off, and the next crew came on, and I was going to go into Milwaukee. And that North Shore Electric.
- John: Yep, I know it well.
- Robert: And there were so many people, I thought I better not go any farther than Kenosha because I'll never get back here. But that was one big celebration that night. And then during the time I did duty there, that was, shortly after that, we got in about 1,200 POWs from Japan, that were taken prisoner of war on Wake Island. And the Philippines. And of this 1,200, there were, that was all that was left of about 7,000.
- John: Yeah.

Robert: And of course, you know, they collected their back pay and they gave them some extra money for the meals and stuff they didn't get while, like maintenance money, you know. And some of those guys got \$7,000 or \$8,000, you know. And that was a lot of money. And so, and a lot of them were mentally had problems, and booze was a big problem.

John: Yeah.

Robert: Oh. And the commandant at Great Lakes came over there one day he started giving them a hard time, some of them are drunks. They just picked him up bodily and threw him out the door. Then they were all restricted.

John: Yeah.

Robert: And here the Marines that are on the gate, Jeeze, these guys have been forty-four months in prisoner of war camps. You aren't going to restrict them. So we told them, okay, we're going to be on the gates from four in the afternoon till eight at night, and then we'll be on again at six in the morning until ten on Monday morning. You guys go out. They all went out and visited their families, and stuff like that. The camp emptied out, you know. And I says, well, all five of us could have got court-martialed, you know.

John: Sure.

Robert: But somebody must have thought better of it because we never heard another word about it. But I said, there was a big, big difference in the treatment of POWs then and now. You know when they come back now, versus what it was then at that time. And you know, by that time, most of us that were on the gate were twenty, twenty-one, and you know, when you're that young, you think, well, you're a veteran, you know, you weren't married, you know. So what the hell, and so we broke a few rules there.

John: Uh-hunh.

Robert: They never put us in the brig.

John: When were you released, then? When did you get out?

Robert: By July of that year, I asked for a transfer to Saint Albans (?) Naval Hospital in New York. And I had eight more surgeries there. They were mostly nerves and stuff like that. And then osteomyelitis and things like that and two of the bone grafts that I had. But that was a situation there that was as far as a hospital goes was totally different because there was a

group of men from New York. They called them the 52 Association. And a lot of them were these money backers for Broadway shows. Stuff like that. The war was over then and so they had some station wagons, and they would hire these girls. We would sign up on a slip at the hospital, they would send a girl out, and then we'd have to sign up ahead of time. They'd pick six of us up. We'd go into Longchamps or some real fancy restaurant and then from there to a Broadway show. We went to a Packer-Giant game. Madison Square Garden. Those guys really, everything was on them. So I seen about fifteen, sixteen Broadway shows.

John: I'll bet there are few people in the country that can say that.

Robert: The crazy thing about it was that there were so many of the guys didn't take advantage of it. I said, Jeeze, here I am in New York. So I signed up for every one I could, you know. That was a great group of guys there. See, they always had these try-outs at Greenwich Village, in Connecticut. And we went there for this one, and then they had a party afterwards with Bert Lahr, three guys, three of them that were in that, a totally different play. And this guy that did the soft-shoe dance, oh, what was his name? He was quite famous at that time. He was a good dancer. When we went to a lot of these plays, these guys were backers, so after the play we would go backstage and have a party there. You couldn't ask for better.

John: Well, when did you get released?

Robert: In December of 1946. A doctor said to us, said to me, "You know, you are going to be around here quite a while yet because of this osteo. Would you take a discharge and go to VA?" I said, "Sure." And so I took a discharge and they discharged me from the Brooklyn Navy Yard. And then I came back to the VA offices in Wausau. That's how I wound up in Wausau.

John: Okay.

Robert: And then those guys were really terrific. They were very helpful guys. But they only gave me \$82 a month. And I did find an apartment that I rented for \$50 a month, but that sure didn't leave me much. And my arm was still, the drainage was still there from the, and I needed bandages changed what, four times a week. And then they told me that in six months you can start to get into the VA. So the guys from the VA office there, they said to me, "Go to this friend of ours." This doctor, he was just a couple blocks away there. So I went to his office and, Merritt Jones, his name was. And he said, "Oh, you are going to need some bandages changed." He says, "Come in the back door and this particular nurse will take care of you. You won't have to wait in the waiting room. How much is the VA giving you?" I said, "\$82 a month." He says, "You can't live on that." So then he got on the phone. He called a guy by the name D. C. Everest. He was

known as the American Corporation then. See everything in Wausau is D. C. Everest High School, and so they were good buddies. And he said, you go down to Rothschild and you talk to him. So I went down there and here is this guy that owns all these corporations in Canada and the United States. And we sat down and we talked for three-quarters of an hour.

John: That's great.

Robert: And he says, "Well, we're going to building a new plant on Bridge Street, and the engineer's going to need some help in his office for answering the phone and running errands. And you can help him and does his transfusions (?) and stuff like that." And I says, "Great." So he paid me \$175 a week, which was pretty good at that time.

John: Look, we're getting to the end of time here. Let's wrap this up. Let me ask you. There's a question I ask vets that I talk to. You were a young guy with your life ahead of you. And then this war came along and just drags you out, and put you in harm's way. How do you feel about that?

Robert: Well, at the time, I volunteered. I expected to do it. You know. Everybody did his thing in World War II. And I had no regrets. The only problems that I had afterwards is not the local VA offices that we have in town here, as far as the clinic. But the national VA in trying to deal with them. They told me that I was eligible for a ten percent increase a while back. That was forty-four, forty-five months ago. And finally Dave Obey said to me, well, Dave is a good friend of mine, and Dave said fill out a release of information form in that office. And so I did. And about January I got a letter that said you have been put on a waiting list here, signed so and so, in Washington. It will probably take a year. That was the 7th of December. Well, then, on the 9th of December, the DAV come along with a letter that said disregard that letter, your claim has been approved.

John: Well, that was Obey.

Robert: I don't know if Obey had anything to do with it or not.

John: I'll be he did. I need a signature, Bob, from you, here, on that release. I am going to turn this off.

**[End of Interview.]**