

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
LEROY J. ZIARNIK
Artillery, Marine Corps, World War II.

2005

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Ziarnik, LeRoy Joseph, (1921-). Oral History Interview, 2005.

Master Copy: 1 videocassette (ca. 62 min.).

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Leroy Ziarnik discusses his service in the Marine Corps in the Pacific Theater of World War II. He talks about basic training at “Jack’s Farm” (near San Diego, California) and Camp Pendleton (California). Ziarnik states he served in Kwajalein and Roi-Namur (Marshall Islands), Saipan and Tinian (Northern Mariana Islands), and Iwo Jima (Japan), and, between campaigns, he was based in Maui (Hawaii). He details deciding to withdraw from high school and enlist in the Marine Corps with a buddy, and he describes arguing with his father about it. Ziarnik speaks of almost not getting his high school diploma and getting orders to report the same night as his prom. He talks about a typical day at basic training, getting an extension from his doctor after a ten day furlough, and assignment to H Company, 3rd Battalion, 14th Regiment, 4th Marine Division. He talks about the types of Howitzers his artillery company used. Ziarnik recalls hearing scuttlebutt about Native American code talkers and portrays a Mexican soldier in his unit who enlisted in the U.S. armed forces by pretending to be a Native American. Ziarnik mentions wounding his hand, being in the hospital for an illness, and turning down the Purple Heart. He describes landing on Roi-Namur and seeing dead bodies in the water. He touches on conditions on Saipan and emphasizes the importance of Tinian as an air base. While being part of a crew moving an officer’s club, he recalls the men dropping cases of liquor on purpose so they could drink what spilled. Ziarnik describes attending Sunday-afternoon dances on Maui and having difficulty finding dancing partners. While writing home on Christmas Eve, he reveals being struck by loneliness. He details landing on Iwo Jima: being on a landing craft that broke down, having difficulty digging in the sand, and bombarding Mount Suribachi. After one of his friends was shot on Iwo Jima, Ziarnik talks about helping carry his stretcher and, years later, meeting his friend again at a reunion. He discusses keeping in contact with other men from his unit and how good it felt to return home. He expresses his support of the Iraq war, but acknowledges that “war is hell.” Ziarnik recalls his feelings after hearing about the atomic bomb that was dropped on Japan and analyzes casualty numbers of the 4th Marine Division.

Biographical Sketch:

Ziarnik (b.1921) served in the Marine Corps from 1943-1945 and received Presidential Unit Citations for serving at Saipan and Iwo Jima. He currently resides in Appleton, Wisconsin.

Note: Interview conducted as part of the Dane County Transitional School's (Madison, Wis.) Veterans History Project in partnership with the Madison Breakfast Rotary. Interview Location is American Legion Post No. 76 (Sun Prairie, Wis.).

Interviewed by Patrick Finley, Andy Bowe, Judy Henderson, Mike Ziarnik, Jon Garner, David Stephens, and Danielle Boullion, 2005.

Transcribed by Taunia Northouse, Wisconsin Court Reporter.

Format corrected by Jeff Javid, 2008.

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2010.

Interview Transcript:

Patrick Finley: April 27th, [2005,] LeRoy Ziarnik. And, if you wouldn't mind, LeRoy, just let us know a little bit about your—what division, where you were in the war, what war.

LeRoy Ziarnik: I was—we started out at boot camp, as you know. And then we—after boot camp there, we were transferred to a place called Jack's Farm there. That's right out of San Diego there. And it was a, more or less, training camp there for tanks and all that. But we—when I say we, it was some of the other guys that had just gotten out of boot camp, too. And they were doing infantry work there, more or less, along that line. We were there for possibly, I would say, six, eight weeks, or something like that. And then we were transferred to Camp Pendleton, which was just forming—the 14th Marines and the Fourth Division was being built there. It started out on the east coast. But they were all being transferred to Camp Pendleton there. And so that's where we got most of our basic training there in the states there, doing operations off of San Clemente Island and all that stuff there. And then from there on we started going into combat there.

The first place there was the Kwajalein and Roi-Namur, or the now Marshall Islands. We went and got—well, I had a first view of Hawaii, like I was mentioning here in the early conversation. But then we went back to Maui, and that's where we built our camp and stayed there.

And from there we had gone on to Saipan and Tinian [Northern Mariana Islands]. From there back to Maui, from Maui over to Iwo Jima, back to Maui, which was our great place of relaxation and resting there. And from there we were discharged back to the states in November, already, of 1945 because the war had ended. And as the group there, regiment there, and battalion, we were out just about the longest in one place, so—and the closest to the United States, so we were put back there. And I got my discharge papers in November because I was home for Thanksgiving that year. That was—and I had just gotten home about two days before.

So—

Patrick Finley: You guys want to start the questions?

Andy Bowe: Were you drafted or did you enlist?

LeRoy Ziarnik: I enlisted. I was 17 years old and a senior in high school. The picture in here of John Wishau (ph) there, one of the buddies there that we were having fun there in Hawaii there, I had met him there. But I had gone to school that morning and I had gone to my first class, which was gym, and somehow or other scuttlebutt came out there and was going around that they're going to quit enlisting, enlistments there. And so, after gym I found John. I said, "Say, they're going to quit taking enlistments there." And we were talking about going into the Marine Corps. "What do you think? What are we going to do?" I said, "We'll go down and see the principal and ask for a discharge from school" and all that. So that's what we did, went down and asked them and told them we were going to enlist. And by then he said, "Do your parents know?" And there was a little white lie at that that said yes. But first we had, we had to go—he said okay. And we went to home and told our parents, and there was a negative no there.

But—

Judy Henderson: From both parents?

LeRoy Ziarnik: Pardon?

Judy Henderson: From your mother and your father?

LeRoy Ziarnik: Namely, my father because I—well, I mean, she was in connection with him, but he was doing the man-of-the-house thing—no. And then the smart-aleck teenager said, "Dad, I'm 17. I'll be 18"—this was in December of '42. I said, "I'll be 18 in March." So I said before they would find out, they'd leave me in the car already. So, well, that was it. So John and I went to Green Bay from Appleton—from Manitowoc because that's where. We were living in Manitowoc, Wisconsin. And, we went to Green Bay and enlisted; and the rest is history there.

Judy Henderson: Did you have any siblings? Do you have—

LeRoy Ziarnik: I had a brother and a sister.

Judy Henderson: Older or younger than you?

LeRoy Ziarnik: Each. Brother was older, sister's younger.

Judy Henderson: Was your brother enlisted also?

- LeRoy Ziarnik: Not at the time. He was married, and that and he was being left go there. But before the war was over—in fact this was 1945, the summer of '45 they drafted him, and then he had gone into the Army. And I—when I—when I got back in November, I had hoped to see him in California because that's where he was stationed. But he had already left for the Aleutian Islands, and that's where he spent his year out there before being released.
- Judy Henderson: What happened to your high school diploma? I just had to interrupt you guys.
- LeRoy Ziarnik: The high school diploma was given to you if you stayed in high school up till the time you left.
- Judy Henderson: Okay. So you did get one?
- LeRoy Ziarnik: There's a big story there.
- Judy Henderson: What did you do?
- LeRoy Ziarnik: Well, I was sworn in. It was February of 1943 then. And they said at that time, well, we'll be calling you in about two or three weeks there.
- So I went back home. I was sworn in in Milwaukee there. So I went back home, and I did not go back to school there because I would go in two to three weeks there. But in about five or six weeks there they caught up there. They called my mom and asked her for my address. And she said, 1230 South 20th Street, Manitowoc. And they wanted to know why I was not in school. Well, the next day I was in school.
- Judy Henderson: Ahaaa.
- LeRoy Ziarnik: And I stayed in school there until the end of April there when I left there—I guess first part of May there really. And, so consequently, my mother picked up my diploma with the other graduates in June. She sat there.
- Mike Ziarnik: Why don't you tell the story about your prom and all that?
- LeRoy Ziarnik: Prom?
- Mike Ziarnik: Yeah. Where you had a date for prom.
- LeRoy Ziarnik: Oh.

- Mike Ziarnik: But you got the call that you had to report after your—
- LeRoy Ziarnik: Okay. I got notice there that I'd be leaving, and I had asked the girl to go to the prom with me. But I didn't ask her till, I think, about two weeks before the prom, something like that. I had held off. And, about a week before is when I got the notice that I will be leaving on a Friday, which was prom night that—so I had to go to school and tell her that she would not be going to the prom. And, well, the whole gang at school there, you know, that you have your little gang, "what are you going to do, what are you going to do?" "I don't know." Well, a cousin of mine said, "I'll take her if she'll go with me." So he did. He took her to the prom there. And she did. So she forgave me anyhow.
- Judy Henderson: Oh, good, good, good.
- Andy Bowe: What do you remember about boot camp, and instructors at boot camp?
- LeRoy Ziarnik: Boot camp is an education by itself. Like I said, after 60 years, or 60 some odd years—that's when I went—a lot of it is gone, but all I know is, the sergeant in charge thought he was God himself. But, after awhile I found out whatever he had said was pretty good there. And it was really to train you and to take the orders and all that. His name was Fortman that I recall there. And, like I said, it was a rude awakening from civilian life there. When you're going to school there as a senior there and gay and happy and all that stuff, and here you're now confined to a base there without anything. There was no ice cream. There was no candy. There was no soda pop or anything that—that was all off base. If you were caught in the PX there, you had some threatening things, but I was never caught there because I learned fast.
- Judy Henderson: You had someone else go there for you?
- LeRoy Ziarnik: No.
- Judy Henderson: I just didn't know if any of those little girls were around there.
- LeRoy Ziarnik: So, like I said, it's a rude awakening—training is—because it's so different from the standpoint that these are the orders. You better follow them. Because if you don't follow them, you are in dutch [trouble]. And dutch can go a long way then.

So, it was getting up in the morning; that wasn't too bad, even though it was 5:30 or so. Because I was used to getting up earlier anyhow. And then it would be breakfast and roll call; and from then on you start your walking, doing exercise, things like that there. We had rifle training after, I think, five or six weeks there. And we passed it there. And then we had a bayonet training school there. I passed that there. So, all in total, I mean, I was lucky enough to take it, and I accepted it.

I found out—and then at the end we were given a 10-day furlough. But the furlough started at midnight of—let's say it was the 15th, or midnight on the 15th. You did not leave the base till 12 o'clock at noon on the 15th, so a half a day was shot. Well, coming home I developed a sickness there, sore throat and all that, by that. In fact, it got worse. And I had gone to the family doctor and he was going to treat me. I said, you know, I said, "I've got to report this and I'll probably have to go back to Great Lakes there." And he said, "No," he said, "I'll take care of it." And he wired the commanding officer down at the base there, and they gave me a five-day extension.

Jon Garner: Wow.

LeRoy Ziarnik: But, it was just because of the doctor there working with me. He was the family doctor there at the time. So that was it. And then I got back. And from there we went on then.

Jon Garner: How did you get into the artillery rather than some other branch—infantry, or—

LeRoy Ziarnik: I don't know how that really happened.

Jon Garner: That's the Marine Corps.

LeRoy Ziarnik: After we were at Jack's Farm that I told you, a bunch of us were—or the group, I should say—were transferred to Pendleton there. And that's when they were building up the different regiments there—the infantry and the artillery. And, one buddy of mine there, from Stevens Point there who had gone in, he came down and went to boot camp with me in the same number, what you call it of the camp, or the platoon there. He was transferred to the artillery also, but he was in the [T]hird [Battalion] but he was G Company Battery, and I was the H Battery. But, they put you wherever they wanted to. So that was—and it turned out that it was a lucky break.

- David Stephens: What were your weapons? Were they howitzers?
- LeRoy Ziarnik: We had the little guys, the 70—that's the 75?
- Jon Garner: Yes, little 75.
- LeRoy Ziarnik: Little 75. Boom, boom, boom there. And that is the one that we were doing most of the training with till we hit the Marshall Islands. And, after that we would—we went to Maui, and then they gave us 105s. And there were—I think the 75s were taken away completely and we had 105s. And then we had a battalion of 155s toward the end. I think that was—I don't know if we ever fired them, if we had them for Iwo Jima. I can't recall anymore. But that's what it started with, the 75s, the 105s; and we stayed with the 105s then, but there was another battalion formed with the 155s.
- Jon Garner: There's a picture there. There's a 105 round that landed on a Jeep.
- David Stephens: That's quite a picture.
- Jon Garner: That's an American Jeep and an American 105 round.
- LeRoy Ziarnik: And they never exploded there.
- David Stephens: That would have been the end of that Jeep. Radios were quite a bit bigger back in those days, weren't they?
- LeRoy Ziarnik: Oh, yes, they were. Well, they were good for civilians, what they carried and extended messages there. There was boys saw a lot of action up front with the infantry there. And then they'd radio the stuff back to the commands, the fire commands and all that back.
- David Stephens: Right.
- Leroy Ziarnik: So they were very important there. And I don't know their names no more. I mean, that skips me. And I don't know how many. But the greatest amount of being killed—we only probably had nine or twelve killed in the battery there. But most of them came out of the communication section, part of that, that were out front there.
- David Stephens: Out in front. Because we are doing a class, actually, *War and Film*. And so we watched several movies, but one of them was *Code Talkers*, which was about the Navajo, and on Saipan, specifically.

- LeRoy Ziarnik: Oh, right. They became a very intricate part, and well-known. I mean, at first there we didn't hear of them. Then, all of a sudden, the scuttlebutt started coming about the Code Talkers down there. And I had a little Indian guy by the name of Cardona—I think he was part Indian and part Spanish—there in a tent. Well, most of the information he was following, “Hey did you hear this?” “Did you hear what they were doing there?” and that. So, that's how we got really to know about the Code Talkers and the messages there.
- David Stephens: Interesting.
- LeRoy Ziarnik: And the way it was because they used the messages, I think, the words came out with the front letter of each word there from their language into the American language. And that's how they formed the words there, see.
- David Stephens: Yep, yep.
- LeRoy Ziarnik: So that was it.
- Andy Bowe: Wow.
- LeRoy Ziarnik: It was a drawn-out thing, but it worked because the Japanese did not have that code. They couldn't break that one.
- Mike Ziarnik: The guy that you mentioned, that Cardona?
- LeRoy Ziarnik: Yeah.
- Mike Ziarnik: This you found out much later. He was actually portraying himself to be an American Indian. However, he was actually from Mexico.
- LeRoy Ziarnik: Well, I guess that's where he was—
- Mike Ziarnik: He had actually come to the United States, portrayed himself as an American citizen, and enlisted in the Marines, and under the guise that he was an Indian. And then he went on to serve his country. And, what did you say, he became like a sergeant, or a corporal?
- LeRoy Ziarnik: No, no; he became a corporal. He was a good-time Charlie, though.
- Mike Ziarnik: But he kind of came in through the back-door and served the country he was not even native to, actually, which I always thought was kind of interesting.

LeRoy Ziarnik: Yeah.

Andy Bowe: Were you awarded any medals?

LeRoy Ziarnik: Not anything individual. We got a group medal there—a presidential citation for Saipan and Tinian there. And then, I guess—we got, I don't know, was it enhanced with a star there on Iwo Jima there. But I myself did not come close to the medals.

Mike Ziarnik: Well, you refused.

LeRoy Ziarnik: Pardon?

Mike Ziarnik: You refused a Purple Heart, right?

LeRoy Ziarnik: Well, I had a little bang there on Iwo Jima there, and I had gone there and they were going to take the name there. And I said no, I didn't want that. But, when in Saipan, I landed in there and I was in a hospital there because I had ripped open my hand there and it was sort of forming blood-poisoning there. And then I got a sickness, I don't know what it was, there. And this was just before they had gone to Tinian. And I was in a hospital there. And so they were coming through. "What outfit were you there?" And they thought I was wounded there. And I said, "No, no." I said, "I'm just sick." I said I didn't want to take a medal there that those other guys so well deserved there. So that was what I told him there.

Jon Garner: What was the landing—the first landing you made, was it Kwajalein or Saipan?

LeRoy Ziarnik: Kwajalein.

Jon Garner: What was that first?

LeRoy Ziarnik: The first landing at Kwajalein, where we landed, we landed on one of the little islands off of the main two, Roi-Namur. And, after we landed we had our pack howitzers there. And it was rather quiet on this little island because I don't—I think it was the 25th Infantry group there, battalion, that had just gone through the island there if there was any Japanese on there. And there was just the two of them there, more or less residing there. And—but that was your first look of seeing the dead boys there in the water there, and we landed a before the attack on Roi-Namur there. And, so then we

were ready to fire there as the boys were landing there. And there—from there, then, we went to Hawaii—Maui there—and we did our training there. And from there, like I said, then we went on to Saipan and Tinian and the rest.

- Judy Henderson: Did any of your training prepare you to see—to go to that first landing as you said, the men that had passed—that had died and were in the water? How did you handle that? I mean, how—
- LeRoy Ziarnik: No, I wouldn't say it really prepared you that much. I mean, you knew there were going to be dead there, but you didn't see them. But when you see them there laying down there in the water and things like that, I mean, it hits you there. But as long as it wasn't our own—
- Judy Henderson: You can handle it.
- LeRoy Ziarnik: You enjoyed it a heck of a lot more, I should say. Because when you see your own there, that would have been sort of worse there, so—
- Jon Garner: What about the landing on Saipan, then?
- LeRoy Ziarnik: Landing on Saipan took place, there, it was rather nice. They had the beach pretty well cleaned up there, and we just moved in and set up our guns a little ways off the beach there, the first setup there. And the—that was all done in June 15th, there. If my memory serves me correct, we did land on the same day there, in the afternoon there. We got in and we were ready to fire already by night there.
- And the landing, there was a lot of coral there, so that hurt some of the landing craft boats that were coming in there and that. So, that landing took place—it was rather smooth there for us to go there.
- Jon Garner: How long were you on Saipan?
- LeRoy Ziarnik: Well, I was on Saipan from June 15th till I left to go aboard ship there. That was in July. But to Tinian in between time there. And then they were there from, I think it was, what, June—or July 4th or 5th or something like that. And they were on shore, I think, about 10 days or so.
- David Stephens: And Tinian, of course, is where they flew the *Enola Gay* which dropped the atomic bomb which ended the war.

- LeRoy Ziarnik: Yeah.
- David Stephens: Very key island.
- LeRoy Ziarnik: That's what it was. That was the reason for that. Because as we were down there, we had set up there before we moved on again, another position, and that was one of the first B-29s that came in there. And, when we looked up at them and saw those monsters—
- David Stephens: Huge.
- LeRoy Ziarnik: Yeah. It was something there. And, like you say, that was the island that was used there to take them; and the real turning point in the Pacific War there, because then we could use our aircraft, which, prior to that, it was always off of a carrier or something like that and was limited. But, here we had a home base and they were close enough even.
- Andy Bowe: GIs like to pull pranks and jokes on each other?
- LeRoy Ziarnik: Pardon?
- Andy Bowe: GIs like to pull pranks and jokes on each other?
- LeRoy Ziarnik: Some. Not really. It was good luck. I mean, stuff there that, little things there, but nothing really that great to remember there.
- Mike Ziarnik: Why don't you tell the story about when you were supposed to move one officer's club to another officer's club.
- LeRoy Ziarnik: Oh. That was a work battalion there that I was on there. I got a lot of those. So you could see I was important (laughter).
- Anyhow, this turned out to be a work battalion there, and they were changing the officers club on Saipan from one place to another there—not on Saipan, excuse me, on Maui. And then somebody got the bright idea that they were carrying a case of the liquor.
- David Stephens: Ahhh.
- LeRoy Ziarnik: And, they happened to accidentally drop it on end. So what happens is it leaks through the box or case there and you imbibe and have a little taste of the stuff there. So I think what happened is that day they must have dropped about six of them there because, (laughter) generally, if you hit it just right, it was the

corner one that would catch heck, you know. So you could—
somehow or other we got little cups of that.

Jon Garner: Somehow.

LeRoy Ziarnik: And, we had a good time. And, needless to say, when we got back to camp that night, “What kind of work, business was that today that you guys were on?” Oh, you would have liked that one.

David Stephens: Tough job.

LeRoy Ziarnik: So that’s the one. Well, I had a social thing, too. We had that in the beginning there where they’d have Sunday afternoon dances there and you could go to the dance there and that. Right down to the base there they’d bring them in. They’d have a place there.

David Stephens: In Maui?

LeRoy Ziarnik: Yeah. And I wasn’t too good of a dancer even though I was going to go to the prom and all that stuff there. But I had a hard time there finding a partner. And when I’d find them there, I’d make the wrong steps sometimes. Well, this Pete fellow his name was, he was from Brooklyn, New York. I said, “Gee.” I was complaining to him. And he said, “Don’t worry,” he said. “You’re from the States.” He said, “If you made a mistake,” he said, “just give them a dirty look.” He said—and he said, “That will rectify it.” He said, “They’ll cut that out.” Well, that happened once or twice, sort of a dirty look there. Pretty soon there nobody would dance with me anyhow.

David Stephens: That solved the problem.

LeRoy Ziarnik: It solved my problem. So I thought that was funny.

Danielle Boullion: Did you ever, like, keep in touch with your family when you were gone?

LeRoy Ziarnik: Yes. I exchanged a lot of letters there. And I don’t know if they always said that much, but out here enjoying it. We weren’t—but that’s what you put it there, keep them happy at home and all that stuff.

One of the hardest letters I wrote was on Christmas Eve there for that, and I had guard duty. It happened to be from 8 till 12 at night there. And so then I ran to—midnight Mass there was down in one of the other regiments there. And I came back after the Mass

there, and we had lights in the tent there. What did we have—two, four, six guys, I guess, were in a tent there or something. I don't know anymore. But I decided to write a letter home. So I couldn't find a light, so I'm writing by flashlight now. And, "Dear Mom and Dad, tonight"—oh, that's it. Some guy had a radio on in one of the tents there. They were playing Christmas carols. "Dear Mom and Dad, tonight I'm lonely. I'm crying." That's what all I did there. I was sitting there writing a letter and tears were running down my face. So, I thought I was a man, but at that time I wasn't. So that, like I said, was one of the hardest letters to write, there. But other than that, we corresponded, they corresponded back to me quite often there, so—

David Stephens: Are you still in touch with members of your unit?

LeRoy Ziarnik: It's gone done quite a bit there. I had a real—this Ron Wagner in one of those pictures there, I used to—I stood up for his wedding after that—we got home. And then I corresponded with him for awhile and that. And then, for some reason or another we drifted apart. And, Mike, my son there, looked it up there and he found out he died in 1991 was it, I guess?

Mike Ziarnik: Right.

LeRoy Ziarnik: And that. And Bill Walzack, the guy from Stevens Point that I had mentioned earlier there, he's in—he's still up there in Rapids or Stevens Point, around that little group there, cities there. I still see him and talk to him there. The other ones, I get a few of them that I still get Christmas cards with notes and all that there, but about four or five, something like that. It's about all there.

In fact, then there was a Sergeant Wright who was up in Waupaca there, but he was a little older. He was about six or eight years older than I was even. So—that. So he must have been up in his middle eighties there. And he just passed away here about a year or two ago there. I would visit him there and talk to him there and see him.

David Stephens: Okay. Because, you know, we see a lot of these reunions, and I was talking earlier a little bit about Stephen Ambrose and a lot of people trying to get out stories. Because they say a lot of the vets now; I know we're losing about a thousand a day for a variety of reasons. Everybody's getting older.

LeRoy Ziarnik: Yeah. That's it there. Because, like I said, I was 17 when I went in. I'm 80 years old now, so—

- David Stephens: Right. And that's why these guys—and that's why I'm so happy that you're doing this today.
- LeRoy Ziarnik: Well, thank you.
- David Stephens: From my perspective as a teacher of social studies and history, this is probably a pivotal point for the United States coming out of World War II. And these guys, you know, what can they learn from you? What can you tell them about this time, I guess?
- LeRoy Ziarnik: Well, it's—if you go in and are as lucky as I was and come through it and all that stuff, it's a terrific experience. And it's something that even as the years go by and you do forget, but in between time you start thinking; something comes to your mind there. It's a doggone good experience to make. I'm not saying anything wrong, but it brings you from a teenager to a man fast there. So again, even if you have little pranks and all that stuff, but that's okay. That's part of life, there. You've got to have that too.
- So—no, like I said, I was fortunate enough, and I came home and all that stuff there. And so I always thought---in fact, every night there I still thank you, Lord, for what we have.
- David Stephens: Well, we owe you guys, yeah, big time.
- LeRoy Ziarnik: Well, thank you. I don't know if you owe me.
- David Stephens: Oh, yeah, we do, all of you.
- Judy Henderson: What was coming home from the war like?
- LeRoy Ziarnik: It was pretty good. The thing is, that war was really accepted, and so consequently being a veteran opposed to, you know—right? I'm not picking on you.
- Jon Garner: I know what you mean.
- LeRoy Ziarnik: But, you know the truth there with Vietnam and all that stuff where there were mixed emotions there. So, I'm going to use the word, "hero", but I don't mean it as a hero. When you get that whole—oh, you're back, huh? Oh, gee, what was this? Well, we owe—just like you were saying, they don't say we owe you a lot, and all that stuff. So it made you feel good.

Judy Henderson: Well, my father is a survivor of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, so to me you are a hero.

LeRoy Ziarnik: Okay. That would be a hero, that.

Judy Henderson: Yes, you would be.

LeRoy Ziarnik: No. It was a terrific experience, all totaled. That I'll say there.

Jon Garner: What was Iwo like? As a former Marine, I'm always interested and have an opportunity to hear about some of your memories of what it was like to land on that island and accomplish what the Marines, with your support, did.

LeRoy Ziarnik: Well—

Mike Ziarnik: Why don't you start out by telling them about your landing.

LeRoy Ziarnik: The landing, we were all getting ready to land on D-Day there, but before long they saw what was happening because the beaches were being clogged up there, and they weren't getting off the beaches there because they couldn't move the heavier equipment and all that stuff onto them. So, our landing on D-Day was moved off to D Plus 1. Well, on D Plus 1 there they were going in, and I happened to be on a vehicle there. In fact, I don't know what one it was no more, if it was—I was—I wasn't with our gun there because the gun section there that I belonged to there, they got out there, and for some reason I got on the wrong tractor or thing there, landing craft. And it broke down on our way there. And every once in a while there they were dropping shells around there. But, we couldn't move.

And then we began to drift, and we were drifting towards Suribachi, and nothing was taken there on that part because they were still on the beaches and all that stuff.

Well, then I got on—on the third day there to when I got on. And it was, like I said, rough sand there. You couldn't dig in decent and that because it was falling back in there. But we had—the guns were set up above the beach already there. And that's what—where the artillery played their part there. We were over here the Fourth. The Fifth was here. And they took Suribachi, what was it, I think in five or six days, something like that.

Jon Garner: About a week.

- David Stephens: And that's a mountain on the island? It's pretty tall. It's volcanic.
- Leroy Ziarnik: A volcanic mountain there. And there were a lot of caves and that thing there. So it was a—even though there had been a big bombardment there from the navy and the aircraft there, they always felt that there should have been still more to make it easier because they were the part that was knocking out some of these caves and all that stuff. But the Fourth, where we were landing, there were caves and built-in—I don't know what I'm trying to say there.
- Jon Garner: Pill boxes.
- Leroy Ziarnik: Pill boxes like, yeah.
- David Stephens: Machine guns.
- Leroy Ziarnik: Right. So they caught a lot of fire there landing on that beach there. And from there we moved in and we sent up then under the aircraft, or the airfield. And you could reach your targets because the island I think was, what, three to five miles long and a mile and a half wide there. And there was something like 18,000 casualties, wounded, and then dead on that island there.
- David Stephens: Oh, yeah.
- Leroy Ziarnik: So the pill boxes and all that, and these mountains were a dog to take there.
- David Stephens: Maybe the most famous of all the Marine battles, I mean, if you look. That's where the flag-raising—
- Leroy Ziarnik: That was the flag-raising. See, that was a two thing too. There was an original raising of the flag. In fact, that was questioned a couple times there. And then Rosenthal came along.
- David Stephens: Famous photographer.
- Leroy Ziarnik: Photographer there. And he caught the second time. And he said, "Hey, you guys, push it up!" So they did it. And I think that's the most publicized picture there is really there.
- Jon Garner: One of the Navy admiral—no, the Secretary of War was there, and he said that that flag-raising will guarantee a Marine Corps for 500 years. He's probably right.

Leroy Ziarnik: So, just being there like I was gives it impetus when you're talking to somebody and say, "Well, I was on Iwo Jima there," which I was. "Oh, did you raise the flag?" "No, I didn't." But as far as that, yeah, every time there—in fact, that's one night or day under fire is where I almost lost one of my buddies there, John Condon from New York. I tried to get a-hold of him yesterday. I was going to.

Jon Garner: That would be great.

Leroy Ziarnik: See him. Yeah, I was going to talk to him, but there was no answer on his phone there.

Going into Iwo Jima there one night, you don't have too much to do on these ships there; he and I were sitting there and talking, and John said to me, he said, "Lee," he said, "Do you ever think about getting hit?" I said, "Yes." But I said, "I don't want to think about it." Well, on Iwo Jima there, all of a sudden, like I said, we were receiving some gunfire there. And somebody hollered out, "John got hit over there." Oh, God. So—I was not right on the gun at the time. So off I went there to his gun there. There he was laying there bleeding there, and they were loading him on a stretcher. So I helped carry him down there. And by that, his remark was to one of the fellows there at the head—I was down by his legs there. He said, "Tell Lee I'll be back." And they said, "He's at the other end." So he said, "Oh." So they told me. He said, "John's asking for you." So I went back and I was talking to him there. And he was pretty beat up there. And he left and he never came back there. But he lived there. And it was years before I met him again at a reunion. And now we—every once in a while we'll talk together or give Christmas cards and all that. And that's what—now when I was coming here I was going to call and talk to him. I should have done it a couple of days earlier, but I waited till the last there. So, that's the story of John Condon, there. And he got there. But, he survived.

Oh, then he wrote back on—wrote me a letter there on V-J Day there; and he was down at Times Square in New York there. So he said it was really good. He was a poor little rich boy. Why I say that is, his father was a caretaker of—

Mike Ziarnik: Ziegfield.

Leroy Ziarnik: Ziegfield there.

Mike Ziarnik: Flo Ziegfield.

Leroy Ziarnik: Yeah. He had a house and place in New York. And his father was a caretaker there, and his mother was, I think, a cook or a maid there. And, so, consequently, why I said poor little rich boy: when they were gone, they would move into the big house to take care of it and all that stuff there. And, so, he said, "I had the best of two worlds." In that respect, so—I always thought that was an interesting story.

Judy Henderson: Kids, is there any last question?

Patrick Finley: We've got about 15 minutes left.

Judy Henderson: You know, when you look at the war now, what do you think of kids going over and fighting and—

Leroy Ziarnik: Well, basically I'm a Republican, so I'm backing Bush. But I get a bad taste there when I see them going over there. But again, it was—more or less most of these are volunteering to that, so they had their choice there, if they decided there. But the old saying, "War is hell," and it is. There's no doubt about it. Even from the standpoint, like I said, I had it good there and didn't really go hand-to-hand combat there. There was one time I was called there, volunteered to go down there because they had some stuff marching through there and they asked for volunteers, and I happened to be on the telephone there at the time there, so I handed that telephone down and grabbed my rifle and went down there. And—but that was the only time that I saw any close combat. And that was wrapped up fast, too, because they had them captured there by the time I got there about 15, 20 minutes there. They said, "Hey, we'll take care of it, the rest of it." So then we went back.

So like I said, I sympathize for those people there, troops that are over there. But, again, basically I feel that their idea is right because Saddam and all that there, he was no good for the average guy, family back home.

Patrick Finley: What were your thoughts about dropping the bomb on Japan?

Leroy Ziarnik: At the time I was very happy. I was because I knew that was the end because we were beginning to train for Japan. And, the Fourth Marine Division was supposedly to go in at the lower part of the island there and be a diversionary attack. Well, the next day, or whatever it is, they would have been up higher, really, landing. And, so, consequently, we knew that. And the forecaster said if that war wouldn't have ended at that time, a million people would

have lost their lives, between the two of them at least, anyhow. So, like I said, when the bomb said, hey, this is the end of it and they finally realized it, I thought it was great.

When you look at the numbers of human beings, then, I mean, you begin to think, oh, gee. But, like I said, war is hell. So, there it's either he or you. So you always choose yourself, if you can.

- Mike Ziarnik: I always looked at it—the percentage of coming back after four amphibious invasions, a fifth one—you were kind of pushing the odds there at that point too.
- Leroy Ziarnik: Oh, I think you are.
- Mike Ziarnik: Especially when I look at the casualties from the people that were in the Fourth Marine Division—there was over, what, 17,000 casualties? There were 19,000 people in that division.
- Leroy Ziarnik: Well, yeah. See, that—
- Mike Ziarnik: It was high.
- Leroy Ziarnik: The totals. He's talking about the totals, excuse me, from all the engagements. The total casualties there, I was only—I joined the war was 700 and then 1,900—then 5,800—then 9,000—then '98. So that was just—and then you see the casualties of officers.
- David Stephens: Marine Division. This is broken down.
- Leroy Ziarnik: So I don't know if you saw them.
- Judy Henderson: We were looking before. It's amazing numbers.
- Patrick Finley: Any other thoughts or stories that you want to share, Lee?
- Leroy Ziarnik: No. I think that's—I told enough, didn't I, stories?
- David Stephens: Thank you very much.
- Judy Henderson: We really, really do appreciate it.
- Jon Garner: I want to personally thank you.
- Leroy Ziarnik: Oh, thank you.
- Jon Garner: A friend of mine is still in the Marine Corps.

Leroy Ziarnik: Okay.

Jon Garner: And he sent me this note to pass to you. "Dear Mr. Ziarnik, I'd like to offer my sincere thanks and deepest gratitude for your tremendous service to the Corps and country. Your participation in the Library of Congress Veterans History Project will ensure that the honor and valor displayed so readily by the young men and women of your generation to World War II continue to live through the ages. Please accept my best wishes for continued health and happiness. Keep charging. Semper Fidelis, W.L. Nyland, General, U.S. Marine Corps, Assistant Commodore to the Marine Corps. All the best." Spider is an old friend of mine.

Leroy Ziarnik: Thank you. I'll cherish that. I'll tell you, the old saying, "Once a Marine, always a Marine," and that's true. I mean, as you go through there, and, like I met him, it was a fast friendship right away there. And that was the old saying, always, way back then. And I think it's true there.

Jon Garner: There are no ex-Marines. There is only former Marines.

Judy Henderson: Could I have both of you gentleman, if you don't mind standing up and I'll take your picture. And, then, after that could I have everybody in here go into that picture please.

Patrick Finley: Thanks again, Lee.

Leroy Ziarnik: Well, thank you. I hope I didn't bore anybody there.

[End of Interview]