

Eric Walz History 300 Collection

Frank Austin in WWII

By Frank Austin

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Box 4 Folder 3

Oral Interview conducted by Shawn Austin

Transcript copied by Luke Kirkham January 2005

Brigham Young University - Idaho

SA: So Frank can you tell us where you were born and where?

FA: I was born in Rochester, NY April 8, 1923.

SA: How did you meet Aunt Phyllis?

FA: I met her in Hollywood at a Roller Skating rink. I decided I would go there to meet some girls. So I decided to find the prettiest one and if she turns me down then I'll ask the next one. Well she was the first one I asked and she said yeah. So I started skating with her and she started leading...I should have realized that that is how it was going to end up throughout our whole marriage!

PA: Which is just about to terminate.

FA: So then I asked her out on a date. She was 16 years old and we went out on dates and when I went out over seas well we uh corresponded by mail.

SA: So you were enlisted when you met her?

FA: Yeah. I think it was my first liberty out of boot camp when I met her. So I hitchhiked up to Los Angeles from Camp Pendleton.

PA: Tell him about the shoe strings.

FA: Oh yeah! I was at the Marine Corp recruit depot and I was going to go on liberty (this was before I went up to Hollywood to meet her) and the parade is a good mile and I had to walk over to the guard gate and they inspect you. When he looked me all over he said, "Go back and iron your shoe strings. Your shoe strings are twisted up." So they made me go clear back and I had to iron my shoe strings. Because you had to be perfect when you went out on liberty.

PA: Did you tell him about the cigarettes?

FA: Oh, I lit up a cigarette and I threw the butt on the ground. The drill instructor said, "Austin, go over and pick that cigarette up." He says, "You're supposed to field strip a cigarette." It's were you take em and you break em open and you scatter the ashes. He said, "How tall are you?" I said, "Six foot one." He says, "Go get a needle and a piece of thread six foot long." So I got it and reported back to him and he says, "I want you go around this camp and I want you to fill that up with cigarette butts and I don't wanna see ya till its six foot tall." Well trying to find cigarette butts at a camp that is so immaculate. So I kept smokin' cigarettes and sticking' 'em on there. So I finally filled it up and it took me all night long until the morning and I had a flashlight and I went over near the PX and I'd pick-up a few cigarettes and I'd bum a few cigarettes from guys and I'd cut em up. It was a good lesson though. I never threw anything on the ground after that." Then when we graduated we came up to Camp Pendleton. And they put us in this amphibious tractor battalion and we did all of our training. And our job, the amphibious

tractor job, was to bring the infantry in from the sea and afford them fire-power when they disembarked. And then start taking the wounded out to the ships. And uh...bring in ammunition. Now just visualized this; they load you up with all kinds of high explosives, and these amphibian tanks, they were such a big target that the Japanese artillery was firing at you every chance they got. And with all this high explosives in this thing. And you think wow it'll all be over in a big hurry if I get hit. And we did get hit you know.

SA: What was the training like?

FA: The training was pretty hard. Every day we'd fall in before it was day break and we'd work hard all day. They had a place called the Bulk Basin it's now called Camp Del Mar. And we lived in 8 man tents. And we'd go in the ocean in February or whenever it was and we'd be soaking wet most of the time, and practice taking landings. So it was very intense training.

SA: When did you first put-out to sea?

FA: Uh, after about a year at Camp Pendleton. We loaded on these LST's, Landing Ship Tank, that has the bow doors that would open then the ramp would drop down and you could drive off down into the ocean. And usually you'd be about 4 or 5 thousand yards from the shore of the island you were gonna land on. And you'd drive off with about 24 infantry guys. You'd circle around and circle around until everyone was disembarked from the LST's. And then they'd form these waves, these lines, and then you'd head for the beach. In every operation I was in I was in the first assault wave and sometime the firing didn't start right away. They'd wait till 2 or 3 waves come in. But what you have in the first wave is you don't know where the gin emplacements are. You don't know where the mines are. They had corral mines that they'd set on the corral. In fact one of our amphibian tanks hit a ship mine. A ship mine was probably 8 feet in circumference...they never found a piece of it. I heard this tremendous explosion and I saw this debris flying through the air.

SA: Why would they wait until the first wave got on the beach before the opened fire?

FA: Well so they could get the range and they knew the other waves were coming in an they just waited. Well in some of the operations they hit ya pretty hard before ya even hit the beach.

SA: So your first operation was in the Marshall Islands?

FA: The Marshall Islands. The Marshall Islands were a series of small islands. Like if you took a strand of pearls and threw it out; that's what it would look like. And the reason they took it is because it was a safe harbor because these islands were in a circle and in the center there was calm water for the ships to be able to anchor and unload all of their equipment. The thing is in WWII they didn't have any planes or anything that could fly clear across to Japan itself. So they used these islands as stepping stones. Every time

they took an island they'd load it up and build airfields and then they step stoned all the way over to Japan that way.

The first invasion I was in was a little island called Allan Island; it was the code name. There were probably 8 Japanese on it and we pulled in there 200 strong. And I'm blazing' away with this 50 caliber machine gun shooting at this radio tower and just shooting at the trees, really playing war but nobody was shooting back at us. So that just took a matter of 4 or 5 hours to clear the island. So the next day we were going to hit the main island. I was there, "Come-on boys lets go! Let's go get 'em!" Of course nobody was shooting at me. So when we go into the main island where all the Japanese troops are this one crewman was behind the 50 and I was behind the 30 and he took a hit in his head and it just blew everything all over me. The other crewman got machinegun bullets all over him. The Japanese had sacky bottles full of gasoline with a rag stuck in them and they'd light them, throw it at the side of the tank, it didn't really do much damage.

So after the infantry got dispersed it took the dead crewman and the other crewman and then we loaded some wounded in and we went out to this destroyer and disembarked them. Then when I was coming in I was losing control of the tank because it kept going in circles. Well I didn't realize the whole side was shot-up. The pontoons were shot-up. I finally got into water about waist deep in water then it sunk. So that ended that.

And the invasion took 72 hours...I think. And the casualties were fairly light. We lost a lot of people...800 of them got drowned in the surf because these amphibian tanks, there was huge breakers. When we hit the corral with these things you had to shift from third gear to second gear and you had to do it real smooth. If you didn't the thing would stall and the next wave would turn you sideways then the next wave would flip you over and when you've got 25 men loaded down with ammunition and helmets and back-packs and heavy boots on there's no way you can survive. So that was probably about the third or fourth day and there were about 800 marines there floating around all over the bay.

So anyway that just about ended and I had a load of rations to take to one of the main islands and a squall came up and I got lost. So I saw this little island by these coconut palm trees there up in the air. So I said well I'll head for that island and I had all these rations and water. I pulled-up to this island and there's about 25 guys on this island. They were a mortar platoon. They put em' on this island and as soon as the invasion started they were to shell the main island and they forgot about 'em. And they were on this island for probably about a week or 10 days. And they had gone through all their rations. And they were climbing these coconut trees eating green coconuts and they all got dysentery. And I pull-up on this island and this guy said, "Where the HELL have you been!" I said, "What do ya mean where have I been!?! I'm not even supposed to be here." He said, "What do ya got aboard there." I said, "I've got rations and water" He said, "Give it to us!" I said, "No! I can't give it to ya!" Cause I didn't realize at the time that they had been there without practically nothin' to eat. So this Lieutenant pulls a 45 out and he points it (not at me but up in the air-like) and he says, "Give us the damn rations!" Then he told us the story that they had landed them there and they'd forgotten about 'em. There are so many little islands that you don't even think about 'em. And the radio man that they had with 'em fell in the surf and shorted his radio out so they had no communications.

So anyway I get back and said boy we're going to go home now, big parade, we're gonna be heroes. Then this coronal comes up, he was with the first raider battalion and says, "Well boys consider that a maneuver. You aint seen nothin' yet." So I thought: Oh boy!

So we went back to Maui where we had our base camp and got replaced with some new equipment and get some more training before we went to the next invasion from there. So that was a pretty good way to get your feet wet.

SA: Did you make any good friends in your service?

FA: Yeah, ya...ya met a lot of good guys and they were your friends but it seems like you didn't want to got to close because it hurts when one of 'em gets killed or when you get killed, ya know? Of course at that time I thought I was invincible. That nothing could ever happen to me but then when I saw dead friends who thought the same way I thought, you know this could happen to me too. So it changes your whole perspective.

PA: Tell him that story that the bus driver in Saipan told us about the suicide cliffs.

FA: Oh. Well the next invasion that we made after we got trained and everything was Saipan. It was extremely bloody. It was a really tough thing. This is the first time that the Marines encountered civilians because the island had a big civilian population on it. Saipan belonged to the Germans and after WWI they took it away from Germany and they gave it Japan and they said, you can have this island but you can't arm it or defend it in anyway. Well they did anyway.

So we had to take this island. When we hit the beach there it started right off. And they did a very dumb thing (I always thought it was dumb). They said, OK the first 3 waves are not going to stop at the beach like you normally do you're going to go inland for at least 2,000 yards at the base of this cliff and set-up a perimeter defense. Then the 4th, 5th, and 6th waves will come up and meet you there. And we'll take the ground real fast. It was kind of like a blitzkrieg thing where you were just going to plow in there.

Well what they didn't count on was there was a little town called Shalan and Kanoa and they had a sugarcane factory there. And they had a wall about 4 foot high and half the guys couldn't get over this wall with these am-tracks. So we got up there and only about 8 or 10 of us made it up to this cliff. Well at the top of the cliff were these Japanese. They were throwing hand grenades down on us; they were shootin' at us with mortars, machinegun fire. So we disembarked the infantry and the Lieutenant said, "You guys get the hell out of here you're just drawing fire. Go on back to the beach." We're also drawing fire from our own troops, friendly fire. It was a real dumb thing to do. So we decided (I guess there were 8 of us), we decided well, we can make a run for it through the rice paddies, the sugarcane fields or we could take a chance on the road, and the road could be mined. And I said, "You know I don't think they had time to mine the road, so let's take the road." Of course if you get out in the rice paddy you could get stuck and if you get stuck you're a dead bird. So we took the road and the artillery was zeroing in on us. Getting real close, where the shell would hit and dirt will fly over in onto us. And I'm screaming at him, "GO ON! GO ON!!" I'm trying to get his attention so I picked up a can (we carried a few provisions with us) and I threw it at him. He

thought it was a hand grenade and threw it back out. Anyway we finally got back to the beach and I said, "What the hell did you stop for!? I was a sittin duck out there" He said, "Well I couldn't see there was too much dust." I said, "Well you could have gotten us all killed."

Well anyway we made it back and the next 2 days we took that...that same thing. And then we got to the top of the cliff OK. And I kept bringing the wounded back out and bringing explosives in. Then I had about 12 wounded guys; a couple wounded in the leg, a couple wounded in the stomach, another guy got shot threw the neck. Another one hit this bone in his upper arm. And you could give morphine as long as it wasn't a head wound or a stomach wound. And I didn't want to give morphine as long as it wasn't a head wound or a stomach wound. And I didn't want to give this kid with the shot in the neck morphine. So I start pulling up to these ships and I said we got 12 wounded. "We can't take anymore! Go over to that ship." Now get this. I got these guys they're wounded, they've got open wounds and we've patched them up as best we could. And the salt water's coming all over them. So that made their life miserable. So they said, "We got so many wounded we can't take any more, take 'em to that ship." So finally I pulled up to this destroyer and I says, "You gotta take these guys." And he says, "We back and I armed it and swung it around and I said, "You're either gonna to take these guys or I'm going to blow your damn ship out of the water!" They sounded general quarters and before I knew there were 50 sailors with carbines pointed at me. You know I was just so excited these guys were dying. This one kid was shot through the neck, he was going into shock so the officer of the deck says, "Well it looks like we got a Mexican stand-off here." I said, "You gotta take the guys, they're wounded. He said, "All right all right we'll take them. I don't know what we'll do with 'em but well take 'em." I said, "They need medical help right now! You've got a doctor."

So they took 'em all in. But I don't know why I ever did anything like that. So anyway we went back in. When the invasion was almost over you could see the island of Tinian and we knew we had to take it. And this was very mental to me. Knowing that we had to take that island and hit it and end up in the same situation again.

PA: The suicide cliffs?

FA: Oh yeah. The Japanese that had this island said that if the Marines attacked this island, the US Marines were very cruel. If you were a Marine you had to kill your mother or your father to become a Marine. And this is fact. So they told all these civilians that what they would do did your little babies for bayonet practice, rape the women, and torture the men. So the poor civilians, they didn't know what to do, there were pretty close to a thousand that jumped of this cliff and threw their children off the cliff and killed themselves.

We were out scouting a certain area and I noticed a Japanese-American who was an interpreter and he had American flags all over him (laughing). Oh his helmet he has American flags cause he was Japanese. He said to us, "What are you doing out here!?" We said, "We're just patrolling this area." He says, "Well get the hell out of here! You're scaring these civilians." I said, "So what?" He says, "Yeah, well they're trying to throw themselves and their kids over this cliff and we're trying to save them." So we backed off. Then he brought a family out of a cave. And then I didn't see the cliff

because it was probably a quarter-mile away from where we were. When Phyllis and I went back to Saipan we went back to that cliff and it was really sad. And a sad part of what war was too was, there was a city called Garpan on the island of Saipan. And one night we heard this sentry holler, "STOP STOP" and then all of a sudden machine gun fire. The next morning, it was a whole family dead. Three children, a mother, and a father. They were so scared they were trying to sneak away at night. Of course we thought they were the enemy. I wasn't the one who fired on them. Somebody else did.

In between the 4th and 3rd division was a no-mans land. So I took my am-track out there and they wanted us to lay telephone wires between the 2 battalions. So we're out there in the corral and every once in a while we tie a rock on it and throw it down in the corral. And there was a sniper shooting at us, "zing, zing." We swung a 50 around and started spraying in the trees and we hit him. Not that we know where he was it just was a lucky shot. And that stopped that.

Then when we landed on Tinian there were all these mines to put-up with. There's all these Japanese soldiers that know they're going to die. So they were pretty mean.

SA: What did they tell you about the Japanese people?

FA: Well I never believed what they said about them. They said they were not even human, they were animals and it's not true. I mean they were just like everybody else. They were fighting us but they were suicidal.

PA: Don't you think they had a different philosophy about treating their prisoners for heavens sakes?

FA: Oh yeah, they treated the prisoners terrible. They slaughtered the Chinese. They went through and killed a whole village. I think when Billy Mitchell bombed Tokyo and some of the planes landed in China, the Japanese came in, because they were harboring these airman that landed there, they killed the whole village. They killed every child, every woman, every man in the whole village because of that. So they were pretty cruel.

SA: What did you feel towards them?

FA: I just felt that they were really really good soldiers and I had respect for 'em. One thing you don't ever wanna do is underestimate your enemy. Just like right now in Iraq. Some Iraqi said that the American soldiers are cowards. Well that's the wrong thing to think because they're not. And all through all the fighting I was in I never saw anyone that ever cowardized to 'em. Example is on Saipan we were loaded down with high explosives and machine gun bullets and the infantry was running low. And the Japanese had us pushed back right into the water. In fact some of the guys were there laying in the water. And here I'm sittin' out there in this safe zone and the other 2 crewman and myself said, "We gotta get this stuff in there. How we gonna do it?" Your gonna run over these guys when ya go cause it's dark out, you can't see and they're just lined up all along the beach there. I said, "Well we'll figure out some way." We could have stayed out there, in the middle of nowhere. Nobody would have ever known the difference. So

if they say we were cowards, I never saw it. We never even thought about our own life. One hit and you're gone. A hole as big as this house. At least it's over in a hurry. They always said when you're laying in a hole and they're shellin' ya, "Well the one that gets ya, you're never gonna hear it." If you hear this, "shshshshshsh and kpow!" You know it missed you because the sound is after it's done it damage.

So when we landed on Tinian we set-up a perimeter of defense. And that night we knew the Japanese were going to try one of their banzai attacks. And we had a machine gun crossfire set-up. So we went inland about 1000 yards then we pulled back. Then we set-up barbwire and machineguns. And the navy, when it got dark, was dropping parachute flares. So it would light up the whole sky to land. And you'd see these Japanese and you'd see them run behind a tree or a rock or something. And as soon as it got dark they'd move forward. And the order up and down the line was, "Don't fire until you get the word!" And you could hear them talking to each other. And breathing. Finally (I'm behind a thirty caliber machinegun) they said, "Open fire!!" And I thought, "Don't get too excited so your machinegun gets too hot and malfunctions. Because these are air-cooled weapons. So I just, brrbrr, a little bit at a time. The next morning they estimated they killed 500 hundred Japanese. Some of these Japanese had bayonets on the ends of sticks. They didn't even have a weapon. Most of them had weapons. But there were a few of them that didn't. And they're crazy! They just run right into ya. We lost 5 marines.

Then we took the rest of that island and we went back and got some replacements.

PA: How about the code talkers?

FA: Yeah, the code talkers were on Iwo Jima and they were Navaho from Arizona. And the Japanese couldn't understand them. Well nobody could understand them. So we used those guys as code talkers. They were very, very valuable.

I can say this: the Navy Corpsman. If you were a Navy Corpsman and you started messing-up they'd say, "You straighten up or well send you to the Marine Corps." And they didn't want that duty. Cause when you're a Corpsman on a ship and you've got a nice bed to sleep in. You've got good food.

You don't mess with our Navy Corpsman. We had these guys on a pedestal like you wouldn't believe because they did so much good. You'd lay there all night and all you'd hear is, "Corpsman! Over here! Corpsman." And where are these corpsman gonna be? They're gonna be where the shooting is because the guys are wounded. So we respected these guys just one hundred percent. They were just the best guys in the world. I remember this one kid was on this LST. He was a navy guy. And he says, "You guys get to see all the action and I wish I could go with ya. I said, "Don't volunteer to do anything" So he pulled a few strings and he came in on the short party and he was killed. He didn't have to be. He could have stayed out there.

So what's next? The invasion of Iwo Jima? We did not know where we were going. Finally we got out there 3 days and they showed us maps. Showed us all that gun emplacements. Then they said, "This operation is going to take 5 days." They figured there was about 800 Japanese on this 8 mile square island. "You guys are going to be there for 3 days, then from there your going to Okinawa. So there we are. We take off. There we are first wave again. Head towards the beach. We get about 500 yards from

the beach and they opened up on us. I went along side of a LCI (Landing Craft Infantry), it's a small ship. And I'm watching this guy on a 40 millimeter (we called them Palm Palms). They were actually anti-aircraft guns. And I'm watching him shoot because they were a beautiful gun. And it took a direct hit and I'm looking right at it. Smoke and fire explosion. Then when the smoke went away there was just wreckage there. So I thought, "Yeah this is not going to be easy. From my experience this is going to be pretty tuff." So they just slaughtered us. They killed 12 marines to every to every Japanese defender for the first 2 weeks. But when we hit that beach and I lost that whole infantry platoon...it just...it was just horrible! And it went on for 30 some days. There wasn't a day that you weren't shot at, shelled, mortars, artillery fire. And you never got any sleep. You'd find a small bomb crater and find a spot in it and one guy would stay awake. All night long all ya heard was, "Corpsman! Corpsman!"

There was one area where we had a minimum of a thousand dead marines. Couldn't burry 'em because of the land mines. And sometimes I had to drive by there. And you'd take the deepest breath you could and you'd just go like hell...because...4 of 5 days you know. Pretty bad. And then you'd see truck loads of dead marines piled like card wood. Just throwing them on there and taking them over to this area where they were going to have this grave sight...and just pick 'em up and throw 'em off the truck. And pretty soon you get that "bulkhead" stare and you'd lose all your feeling. You could look at a dead marine that you even knew and you wouldn't have any feeling cause there was so much death around you all the time.

And another thing that not too many people know is when we hit the island of Iwo Jima the Japanese had sent over about 100 to 125 Japanese school children on a botany tour to tour the island; not knowing that it was going to be invaded. So they were all lost. They were in these caves and naturally they were all killed. Had anybody known about it they certainly they wouldn't have killed them.

SA: Tell us a little about the raising of the flag on Mount Surubachi.

FA: Ok. I was probably 500 to 1000 yards from it when they raised it. The reason it was taken was because it was the high ground on the whole island. They had artillery spotters up there. And they rained deadly accuracy down on ya. They had these guns and they'd say drop a shell here. Now you gotta go 20 yards to the left. They were just killing us left and right. So the 5th marine division clawed up there and took it. Then they raised the flag up there to show that it was in American hands. That took a lot of pressure of us.

In fact there was a (I landed right next to it) Japanese ship that was shot up and had run aground. And it had this smoke stack that stuck up. And there was Japanese artillery spotter in that smoke stack. And he was right in the middle of us. And he was raining down telling all these artillery guys where to shoot...I couldn't believe how accurate these guys were with their guns! So finally I came back to the beach with some wounded guys and I see this guy with a machinegun (it was 30 caliber) and he was shooting up and down this smoke stack. They finally found this guy. So they just shot it.

There were some pretty interesting things that happened. On every invasion I always ran into this Sherman Tank guy. We called him "Chief," he was an Indian from Arizona. I saw him in the Marshall Islands. I saw him and said, "Hi Chief. How ya doin'?" Then I saw him on Saipan. And said, "Hi Chief. How ya doin'." "Ok." And I'd

only see him for a little bit. I didn't even know what his name was. Then I saw him on Tinian. And then I saw him on Iwo Jima. And he says, "You know ever time I see you I know I'm going to see you again so I guess I'm going to make it." I said, "You know chief, that's exactly the way I feel. So let's keep in contact." And I really felt that way (laughing). As long as I saw him I knew I was going to survive. He was really a neat guy. He was a big strong husky guy. We didn't see that much of each other because he was in a different outfit. But I'll tell ya his outfit saved our butts on Iwo Jima. They brought in tank dozers. Because you'd nock-out a machinegun nest, and then you'd go to the next one, and then they would re-arm it. Because they weren't just a hole in the ground; they were tunnels. So these bulldozers would go up and cover up these things and then they couldn't come out. So they saved our butts a lot. Always a good feeling to have those Sherman Tanks around.

And that's when my friend, my very best friend, took my place and he was blown-up. He was the nicest guy. It's always the nicest guys that get killed. There was another guy and his name was Ruben Loza. And he was American and Mexican. He had citizenship to both countries. He was living in Mexico permanently. He came up to the United States for awhile and they drafted him (laughing). So he got stuck. Because I wasn't drafted I enlisted.

Well when that invasion was over and we headed back to Hawaii and I figured that we were going to hit the mainland of Japan. And they estimated a million casualties. And used to lay at night in the bunk thinking, "I have been so lucky. My luck is going to change up. I'm not going to get home." I just really didn't feel like I would make it home. And of course when they dropped the atomic bomb then it was over. I guess it was horrible thing to do but in the long run it probably saved more lives. It was horrible. There was no doubt about that.

But we took the island of Tinian where the B29's were stationed that flew over. They said they saved 5500 airmen by taking Iwo. Well the Japanese had an airfield there and their fighter would come up and gauge these B29 bombers. They would shoot a lot of them down.

When fighting was over there was this one area cornered off with that yellow tape that they use because it was full of land mines. And here's a bunch of navy brass and they're right in the middle of this mine field. And I said, "Hey you dummies! What the hell are you doing! You're right in the middle of a mine field!" This Lieutenant commander says, "Sergeant, you know who you're talking to." And I says, "Well I more concerned of your safety." He says, "That's Admiral Sprills, the commander and chief of the 5th fleet (laughing)" He came over and said, "What's the trouble Sergeant?" I said, "Well Sir, this is a mine field here." "Well what's the best way out?" I didn't wanna tell him in case he stepped on a mine (laughing). I says, "Just walk out as gingerly as you can." So there weren't too many people that called an admiral a "dummy (laughing)."

On the beach we had a sandbag protection place and on the top of it we put a steel plate they use on air strips. And we sandbagged the whole top of it and when we went back to the beach it was a place of sanctuary. And it faced the ocean. One of the sandbags got a body part in it. And the stench inside of there was bad. So I was sitting right at the opening facing the sea. And there were about 8 other guys lined up inside there. And this one guy that was with our outfit (that was a really tough guy) he said, "Austin, get you ass over!" I said, "Climb over me." He said, "Get over before I knock

you over.” So I moved over and he took my place. And some friendly fire came in (20 millimeter, one of those explosive rounds) hit him right in the chest and blew him right out of the hole. That would have been me if he hadn’t have told me to move over. So things like that happened every day.

We went aboard this LST to load up this high octane gas to take up to the airport that was secure now. There were B29’s landing there that were shot up. So they loaded me up with 55 gallon drums with high octane gas. And I noticed a galvanized drum and I knew it had water in it. So I asked if I could have it and they said I wasn’t supposed to have it. I said, “I’ll trade you a Japanese souvenir for it.” “What do you got?” I said, “I got a Japanese gas mask.” “Ok.” So I gave him this Japanese gas mask and he puts this 55 gallon drum on top of all this high octane gas. We pulled out of the ship and onto shore there and it took a mortar round. And it landed in the galvanized drum and exploded and didn’t explode the rest. Now if that hadn’t have been there it would have hit gasoline.

PA: If he’d been a gambler he’d be a multi-millionaire (laughing).

FA: I swear to God these things happened to ya everyday. One of the funniest stories though was on Saipan and here’s the main ships out there and they’ve got good food. Well we found a cash of Japanese wine and sacky. And I said, “I’ll bet I can take this stuff out to a ship and can trade it for food.” Because all we had to eat were sea rations. So the other 2 crewman...we loaded maybe 15 to 20 cases of sacky and wine. And I pulled up to the USS Indianapolis. And I pulled up to it’s side and got the attention of one of its sailors and said, “Hey you want this?” and I threw him a bottle of sacky. And he missed it. “Don’t worry I got lots of it!” So I threw him another one and he caught it. “What is it?” And I said, “It’s Japanese sacky.” Then I thought, “Oh boy. I hope they didn’t poison it.” Because they could have. Well I didn’t tell him. So I said, “Hey you got a cook aboard there?” “Yeah!” “Go get him.” “Yeah. Ok.” So this cook comes out and he had on one of these white hats, you know? And he had tattoos all over him. Evidently he was a boozer. So he said, “Wada ya got?” I said, “We got wine and sacky.” “What do ya want for it?” I said, “Food!” “Well don’t go away.” So they brought us big salami, gallon cans of corn, tomatoes, fruit cocktail, bread, I mean they loaded us up with stuff like you wouldn’t believe. Pretty soon the officer of the deck came and said, “You men get back to your posts and you...get out of here!” So we pulled out of there and we came back to our platoon with all this salami, bone chicken in these 2 gallon cans. Man we ate like kings for about 3 or 4 days.

You asked, “How did you feel about the Japanese?” This Japanese soldier attacked us by himself and everybody opened up on him. I don’t know who hit him but he laid there for 2 or 3 days. Well we took his wallet off him and we found a picture of him and his wife and his children. So I said, “Hey this guy is just like anybody else here.”

SA: Did that change your feelings about the Japanese?

FA: Yeah it did. It really did. There were a few Japanese prisoners there on Saipan smoking cigarettes. And I remember them dropping this one Japanese soldier down on a

stretcher and the hole from here to here (pointing to the thigh of his leg) looked like it had rice all over it. And it was maggots actually. And actually the maggots would eat the dead flesh and it kept you from getting gangrene.

And I remember after the Marshall Islands they had some intelligence officers come up and they said, "Now look you guys. We'd like you to capture some Japanese soldiers because we get a lot of valuable information from them. So if you can capture any of 'em. Capture 'em and bring 'em back over to intelligence." So after they left our battalion commander, major Krowzad said, "Anybody that captures any Japanese will share his rations with him and be completely responsible for him." So that was the handwriting on the wall.

Another interesting thing is we were back in Hawaii in Oahu in Pearl City. And they had these 3 Japanese prisoners of war and they had this Marine with a machine gun guarding him. And they were loading trash on the truck. So 2 of these Japanese prisoners would jump off the truck and hand his trash can to the prisoner of war in the truck. In the meantime the Marine climbed down on the ground and he's standing there with his Thompson sub-machinegun. Pretty soon they emptied all these cans (I'm watching all this ya know?) And this Japanese prisoner climbed back in the truck and the Marine hands him his Thompson sub-machinegun so he can climb in the truck. And I'm thinking, "Gee what's going on?" But then when I thought about it these guys got it made. They're a curiosity for one thing. They were being fed and they were probably eating better than they had ever eaten in their life. And nobody hated them. They were eating better than they had ever eaten in their life. And nobody hated them. They were just prisoners of war. So I thought well its probably really safe. If they shot the guy where would they go anyway? But to seem him hand him his Thompson sub-machine gun...the guy grabbed it by the barrel and pulled him aboard. He climbs aboard then hands it back to him. I'll never forget that it was so funny.

SA: Well speaking of Maui. Tell us about when you were picked up by those two guys in the jeep.

FA: Oh yeah. We were hitchhiking this other kid and I and we were going to go to Lahaina from Wailuku. And I noticed that these guys were driving and they were driving kind of erratic. And my friend said, "He's drunk." And I said, "Yeah." So he says, "Hey you guys we'll get off here." "Oh you said you were going to Lahaina. Just sit tight." So he takes off and I thought, "We gotta get out of this jeep." So there was this little country store and I said, "You guys pull-over and I'll get some beer." "OK!" So we pulled in there and we jumped out and I said, "You guys are going to kill yourselves." And they did. They ran off this cliff. Are you familiar with that road? It goes along the cliff there.

SA: What was the hardest battle to get through?

FA: I think Saipan was pretty tough. I was in the middle of a...I was telling ya how close to death ya come. We're in a jeep. And were in the middle of a gas dump. And you've got these 55 gallon drums full of high octane aircraft fuel. A Marine Corps Sare takes off on a bombing run and I love those. That's the plane that has the gull wing. And I'm

looking at this plan, and it's such a beautiful plane, and you could still see the pilot cause it had just taken off. And one of his wing bombs dropped off and this other kid and I in the jeep dove underneath the jeep. It hit in the only role of empty gas drums. The rest of them were full. And gas drums are flying through the air. And big clods of dirt. You know if you would get hit with a big clod of dirt it would kill ya. And it smashed the jeep all up. Busted the seat. Busted the hood. And fortunately we were underneath it. But things like that happened to ya everyday.

Another interesting thing is we say a lot of dog fights between the Navy Hellcats and the Japanese Zeros. And there was a navy dive-bomber. And it will go straight down like this (motioning to the ground with his hands) and it will drop its bombs and it has these wing flaps that come down and it could come up like that. Well this Japanese Zeros on his tail. He can't shake him cause it's much more maneuverable than this big old lumbering plane. So he takes off into a straight dive into the ocean and I think, "Oh he's gonna crash in the ocean!" Then all of a sudden he pulls up and the Zero goes straight down in the water. Cause not realizing he's concentrating and trying to shoot this plane down and not realizing that this plane could do that. So we saw a lot of dog fight and lots of them we usually won.

And there were 4 Japanese Betty bombers that would come over and bomb us every night. So what we did is just dive in a hole cause you couldn't hit 'em. They'd shoot at 'em but they were unsuccessful in shooting them down. So I was down at the beach and they were bringing in some 90 millimeter anti-aircraft guns. The army had 'em. And I said, "I've never seen these before. What are they?" And he said, "90 millimeters." Yeah well maybe you can shoot those damn Betty Bombers that come over. And he said, "Yeah, don't you worry and we'll take care of those." So that night they fired one round. It exploded and nothing happened. They fired another round. They hit one of the bombers. Fired another round. Hit another bomber. Fired another round. Hit another bomber. Fired the last round. Nothing happened. And I'm listening and looking. And I see this bomber explode up in the air. They fired 5 round and they shot 4 down. So that was a new weapon that they'd just come out with. It was pretty good.

Now when we were stationed on Maui we were there, stationed, for over 2 years. And we'd go out for 6 months and then come back. Go out and come back. Go out and come back. But the military police on the island were kind of sadistic guys. And some marine would be on liberty in the town of Wailuku there and he'd get a little drunk or boisterous or something. And they'd take 'em and beat 'em up. Take Billy clubs and smack 'em in the mouth and thrown 'em in jail. Did all kinds of cruel things to 'em. And I understand that a position of authority a lot of people take advantage of that because they can push their weight around, ya know? It happened to be Navy day. And a Naval destroyer came in and they were letting people go aboard and take a look. And some of the sailors went into town and they got beat up by the military police cause they were drunk and they were young guys. So they got back to the ship and there's these guys all bloodied up with some of their teeth broken and some of their noses broken. And the captain of the ship says, "What happened?" They said, "They just smacked us around with these Billy clubs. And he says...and you know when your talking destroyer you're talking family cause there's not very many guys on the destroyer. So the captain of the ship said, "I'm gonna give the whole ship open liberty and I don't wanna see one

MP without blood on him. So they went in to town and they cleaned their clocks. They beat the hell out of 'em. And we're sitting there cheering 'em. I happened to be on liberty that day and I see all this scuffling going on then I realized what had happened. And we're not helping 'em because we didn't like 'em any more than they did. So suddenly these guys disappear and the ship was out to sea. And there was a big investigation about it. And the cruelty of some of these guys. And that attracts those types of people who got a cruel streak in 'em. And see we had a whole bunch of 'em. So then it became more tolerable. They didn't bother you so much. What are you gonna do with some kid that's sitting in a bar that's drinking rum and coke and gets a little boisterous you know? Just calm him down. Throw him in the brig, if you have to, then let him out. If any of our guys got thrown in the brig in our battalion like 30 days on bread and water. They got a loaf of bread and a quart of water. They'd stuff salami and stuff in the bread and camouflage it so they could eat. Cause they were just going out raising a little hell but not doing anything bad, you know? So our commanding officer knew what was going on so he didn't care.

SA: What was running through your mind the first time you were in combat?

FA: Well I thought it was a piece of cake cause nobody was shooting back at us on that first island, Allan Island. But then when we hit the main island I thought, "This isn't fun. I don't like this." But you did your job that you were trained for and went along with it. Lot of times when we were taking the infantry in they'd get sea-sick. And they were glad to see land even if they were being shot at, you know? We weren't cause we were so used to it. We had a guy that always messed up. These amtracks had a 7 cylinder radial engine in it. They were airplane engines, 250 horsepower. That's what we had for power in these things. So he took his in to maintenance in Maui to get all its heads milled down to give it more compression, to make it faster. So he decided to take it out on a test run. And he's going in it and he forgot to pull the oil in it and he burnt the engine out. So the commanding officer threw him in the brig and told him, "You're not coming out until we go out on the next invasion. Then your gonna be in my lead tank with me." So we were aboard this LST and we're going out on maneuvers. And our commanding officer's tank had all the radios and all the high-tech equipment in it. And he invited the captain of the ship and some of the high ranking officers to go out for a ride in it. So this guy... I think they called him Penny... so he takes off and he goes down this ramp and I'm sitting up on the bough watching him disembark. And I'm thinking, "He's going way too fast." And that thing went down and it sunk cause it was going so fast. And here's all this brass and the commanding officer of the battalion swimming around out there (laughing) you know? And they're throwing 'em these life preservers. And nobody got drowned or anything but they lost this tank with all this equipment on it. So after the maneuvers we got back to Hawaii. He said, "You're going back in the brig and you're still going out." So we were out and we were on Tinian and he and his 2 crewman were bringing some crewman out to this merchant Marine ship and they unloaded cause they have Dockers on these ships. And the guy said, "You guys want lunch?" "Yeah!" So they tie the Amtrak up with a rope and they go aboard and have their lunch. And there are some empty bunks and they lay down and they fall asleep. In the meantime the ship has orders to move out to the Philippines (laughing). So the ship takes off and of course the line broke. And this

Amtrak is out there going like this and pretty soon it sunk. He lost 3 of 'em (laughing). So the last time I saw him he was still in the brig (laughing). Yeah the poor guy really messed up. We didn't see him for, I don't know, for months. He finally got back with our outfit, "What the hell am I doing out here?" So I don't know how he got back to our camp but I know that I saw him every once in awhile in the brig. He was a nice guy and all he just screwed up all the time.

SA: How were you received when you got home?

FA: Very well ya know? We came back on a battleship, the USS Colorado. We hit an 80 mile an hour gale and that ship...there were waves coming over the bough. What did I do? Oh, we're going down to our quarters to where our bunks were. And everybody had thrown-up all over the place. And this Lieutenant said, "Clean this mess up." And I said (pointing to his arm), "I'm a sergeant. Go get a private and let him clean it up." "Sergeant I told you to clean it up." I said, "I'm not gonna clean it up." He said, "Well I can't make you do it but I can make you wish you did it." So he gave me a job in the garbage grinding room. Where they haul all this garbage. And they had this big garbage disposal, only bigger, and they would throw all this stuff in there and it would go down into the ocean. So that was my job and I was dragging this slop to put it over in the garbage grinder and it tipped over on me. It hit a steel rivet in the deck and it spilled all over this guy's leg. "Hey you idiot what are you doing!?" And we got into a fist fight and we couldn't hurt each other cause of all this garbage we were slipping all over the place. So he said, "You're a real trouble maker aren't you? We'll fix you up and give you a worse job then grinding garbage. And I got the job of going down into the refrigerator and hauling sack of potatoes up and all kinds of food. It was a hard job but the cooks fixed me the best food in the world. "Do ya wanna steak? I'll throw one on the grill for ya." I didn't have to wait in line for chow. It was a great job. I really liked it (laughing).

And my bunk was all the top of the bunk-head. I had about this much room. I couldn't turn over once I got in the bunk. I couldn't turn over cause my shoulders would hit the top. But it was quite a trip back. Then when we pulled into San Diego I sent Phyllis a telegram telling her I was back.

SA: Well Frank what was something, amidst all those feelings and emotions that helped you get through it?

FA: Wondering...well getting letters and pictures from Phyllis and wondering what I was going to do when I got out of the Marine Corps. Cause I didn't even finish High School. And I had to have a trade. And my dad was a watchmaker so he got me started so...

PA: Well you did come back and get your High School diploma.

FA: I went back and got my High School diploma. That's as far as I got though. So I think the comfort of knowing you were gonna go home or hoping you were gonna come home. What are you gonna do to make a living? When are you gonna get married? So that was pretty comfortable. Especially hearing from her all the time. Then I heard from

my father and both my aunts. They always wrote me ya know? It was so good to get letter. That's why on Iwo Jima they dropped the mail by parachute cause they knew how important family was. And I remember we're sittin' there and the war is over and rotation's starting and they're starting to send people back. "What are you going to do for a living?" And this kid says, "You know if somebody gives me a job for 50 bucks a week I'd sign up for life." And I say, "Who the hell wouldn't? Fifty bucks, are you nuts?"

PA: You were getting how much a month?"

FA: Eighty dollars a month (laughing) as a sergeant. So that was our expectations. I was in town one time and I met this Chinese girl and I thought she was Japanese. And they didn't bother the Japanese in Hawaii because there were so many of them ya know? She says to me, "What do you think of the Japanese?" "Ah..." I said, "They're like anybody else. I like 'em." She says, "Well I don't cause I'm Chinese." And I thought, "Well that blew that." Not that I was going to go out with her or anything (laughing).

PA: He has that hoof and mouth disease a lot (laughing).

FA: We had a good time. I used to hand around some of my buddies. Part of the time we were in Oahu, Pearl City where we had a camps set-up and then we went into Honolulu. And I talked a lot of these guys out of getting tattoos. And I remember this one tattoo parlor they had this Chinese couple. He smoked his cigarettes with the ashes and fire inside of his mouth. And she'd come up and she'd say, "Come on Marine get tattoo. Waz da matta you chicken shit?" "Oh no. I'm not. Put one right there."

PA: I'd a left you in a second if you'd a come home with a tattoo.

FA: That one scum bag that I knew in the Marine Corps. He had USMC emblem here (pointing to thigh). And he had USMC here (pointing to lower leg). And then underneath his breasts he has sweet and sour tattooed. And he was a real low class piece of garbage, you know? And he had a pair of channel locks pliers and he would pull the teeth...and he had 2 bull durum sacks. I don't know if you know what a bull durum sacks are but it's a little wool sack full of tobacco. In those days people used to roll their own cigarettes. He had 2 of those full with Japanese gold teeth. And somehow he got big sores all over his body. So they took him out to a hospital ship and they told us to get his gear and get it together. So I took his gear, put it in a pile, threw gas on it, and burnt it.

We went over to this cave that we worked over with flame thrower (I didn't but some of the guys did) there were about 25 Japanese soldiers in there and they wouldn't surrender so they hit it with a flame thrower. He brought out a Japanese head. And they had been in there for 10 days. And this is in the jungle. And he started ripping his teeth out. And I got away from that guy as fast as I could. He was...

PA: I wonder how he got into the Marine Corps?

FA: I don't know. I only got into one fight in the Marine Corps. We had this other scum bag from Texas. And he kicked one of the windows out of this hut we were in. He said, "Anybody who tells the drill instructor that I kicked that window out he's gonna have to answer to me." I said, "Well I'm tellin' him. He'll put the whole platoon on...we'll be up till 2 in the morning." So we started a fist fight. And he was a short stocky guy. And I fell down and when I fell I had my hands behind. And he put a knee on this side and a knee on this side. And he's just wailing on my face. And finally the guys there pulled him off. And I was all beat up bad. So I thought there's no way that guy could whip me in a fair fight. It was just that we were inside and he was kind of a short bulky guy. So the drill instructor looked at us and he had a few marks on him too. So he never said anything about it. So one day we're coming back from the PX and he said, "Would you like me to clean your clock again?" So I smacked him one and we started a fist fight. And I beat the hell out of him. But I had some room. So that was the only time I got into a fight. And he was in the brig most of the time. He was a filthy guy. Just a low class trash. But there was very low percentage of that type of guy. Most of them were pretty neat guys.

We used to listen to Tokyo Rose. Ever hear of her? She was a Japanese who was educated in the United States. She went back to see her relatives when the war started. So because she could speak such fluent English they used her for propaganda. They said, "Hi Marines how are ya? I guess you know your girlfriends are sleeping with the sailors right now at home." And she'd bring in all these derogatory stuff and they thought it would upset us. But it really didn't. We kind of enjoyed listening to her. And she'd play all these good songs. She'd play all the newest songs. So there were a lot of the newer stuff that she didn't have so one of the B29 Bombers was bombing Tokyo and that's where she was. And by parachute they dropped a whole bunch of new records for her. Whether they got to her or not I don't know. But I kind of felt sorry for her cause she was in a bad situation. She got over there and if she didn't do what they told her...so she put on this act. And it didn't faze us. We enjoyed listening to her. Yeah Tokyo Rose, I'll never forget her. And she would interview prisoners of war. We're sittin' there listening to her and this one kid (I didn't know him too well). She said, "Well here's a prisoner from such and such city." And this kid says, "That's where I come from." It was his brother. He says, "Hi Mom. Hi Dad. I'm fine the Japanese are treating me just fine. Don't worry about me." They didn't treat him nice at all.

Another thing where I could have been just killed was they wanted some volunteers (we were back in Hawaii) to go to this island, they wouldn't tell us what island it was, and our job was to take these Bangalore torpedoes in and bring 'em up and lay 'em in the corral and then blow holes in the corral so they could get small boats in through there. Well that island was one of the most heavily fortified islands that there was. And if we'd a landed on that island they'd annihilated us. They'd a killed us all. There's no way we could have done that. But they called the operation off. So I said, "Ya know I don't think I'll volunteer anymore." But most of the guys volunteered for it. Yeah they did some crazy things. You saw some heroic things.