

## Tom Harwell

Tape 1 of 1

**Question:** Let's talk about your days in the Marines.

**Answer:** Okay.

**Question:** Now you enlisted before the war. How old were you?

**Answer:** You want the truth? I was -- actually I was 16, but therein lies a tale. I wanted to go in the Corps. And my folks had no hang-up about it but I was 16. And you had to be 17 with parental consent. So I says no problem, I will be 17 two months later. So I advanced my birth date, which was in November -- I advanced it to October. So I was -- my birth date was October the 25th instead of November the 25th, and I went in the Corps. To September. I advanced it to September. Sorry, let me go again. I advanced it to August, cause I went in in September. I advanced it to August instead of November. That was fine. I went to Corps. Get up to Alaska, and I'm in Kodiak and I forgot what the hell come up. Something, I had to fill out some papers. And they wanted my birthday. So I put my birth date. They call me and say, hey, what -- what the hell's going on here? Don't you know when you were born? And I said yeah. And I told him what had happened. Well, he said, let's correct that. So I finally got my record back to the correct birth date, but yeah, I went in at 16.

**Question:** Because by that time you were 17?

**Answer:** Oh, yeah, by the time this came up, this was the next year, you know, after the first of the year, sometime the spring of '42, and then no big deal, you know, they just had to make a correction as though it was a typo -- well, I don't know how the hell the top did it, kept me out of trouble.

**Question:** Well, anyway, you were going in no matter what?

**Answer:** I went in. Oh, yeah, I knew there was a war coming. Cause everybody else did. But I went through -- through boot camp in San Diego. And boot camp was over. I was -- when Pearl Harbor was bombed, I was in a casual company in San Diego waiting transfer to wherever I was going to go. We all ended up out on the beach -- the sand beach at San Diego Harbor that faces -- faces the Naval -- recruit depot -- whatever the hell they call theirs -- setting on a machine gun all night. About three or four days later we got orders cut, four or five of us out of my recruit platoon -- got orders cut for Kodiak. Well, we didn't know Kodiak. We got orders to go to Seattle. So we go up there, I trained, and we're at Seattle -- the Marine barracks in Seattle, and then orders come through to go to Kodiak, Alaska. So they put us on a cattle boat called SS Northstar, and it was a true cattle boat. Anyway went up there and most of the guys that I was with -- because we had not only Marines, some sailors, soldiers. And down in these damn holes I, blamed pipe bunks and stacked you know two feet apart. I says BS, I'll cut this stuff. So I went up -- up on the bow of the Northstar, now it's cold, ice, freezing rain, and I sacked out against a steam winch -- stayed out of the hole -- because I would. I never had trouble seasickness, but anybody would have got sick in that. So I made friends with the crew and was helping them on the deck, so I got to eat in the crew's mess once in awhile. Okay, went into Kodiak and I was in Kodiak until.. we got there, well I was at sea over -- we left -- we left Christmas eve, and we got into Kodiak sometime in would have been sometime in January. I don't remember how long. And I was there until July '43. I was there 19 months. And my term was up for there and I transferred and had requested radio school. So I went from Kodiak back to San Diego to radio school. And I went through radio school and then I went into tank school.

**Question:** When you were in Kodiak had Pearl Harbor already happened?

## Tom Harwell

Tape 1 of 1

**Answer:** Oh, yeah, Pearl Harbor happened when I was in San Diego, at boot camp that happened. That happened the 7th of December and I had been out of boot camp maybe three weeks.

**Question:** We're at war now.

**Answer:** We're at war. I went up to Kodiak, and then when I come back, I went to radio school in San Diego and radio school I went out to a place called Jack's Farm which was a tank training outfit out by -- out of San Diego out toward -- toward Camp Elliott, out in the boonies. And the purpose of the tank farm was because I was a radio operator, going to go into tanks and so they figured I ought to learn how to drive them. So I went through tank school and then went into the -- I don't know how this come up. But I went from there -- when I was to be transferred into a line outfit, the 5th Marine Division was forming at Camp Pendleton, so I went into the 5th -- 5th Division. And went into -- assigned a weapons company, 27th Regiment, and I stayed there, actually in Pendleton through all of our training until we headed for Hawaii and I don't remember when the hell that was. I went over there, I'd been there in July, so it would have been early '44, probably. January, February of '44. My brother was in the 5th Division, 28th Marines, also there. So he and I was rooming together in San Diego when we could get away, which was whenever we wanted to. Okay, from there we went to Hawaii, Camp Kamehameha -- went to Kamehameha, Hawaii, for training, which was called Camp Tarawa. We stayed there until we set sail for -- well, we didn't know but ended up being Iwo. After beaucoup moons aboard ship, and then we went into Iwo and -- and we hit Iwo on the 19th, February, that was the 19th there so I think it would have been the 18th here, but anyway. I was with weapons company assigned to a 37 millimeter platoon as communications for the -- for the platoon. We were attacked, too, as far as I can remember, 3rd Battalion, 27th, but I'm not sure. We went in in the third wave. And first wave and second wave was sitting right there with us, all of us stacked up, couldn't go anywhere on the beaches. We worked out of there and I think we were a day or two days getting across. Cut across airfield one, turned and went -- 28th crossed with us, 27th and then 28th crossed the island, which is like a pork chop, but anyways, 28th turned for Suribachi and the 27th turned to the north for the north end of the island. The 4th Marines who had landed just north of us, 3rd Marine Division was held in reserve. Okay, from there until we got off, I was on the island I think for 38 days, I'm not real sure. Until the island was secured. There was no -- there was no rear area, obviously. An island three miles by five miles, that's well within the range of anybody's artillery. So I stayed there and my brother was killed on the 20th. I went in on the 18th -- I went in on the 19th. He went in on the 20th, he was killed on the 20th. He was also a radio operator and he was killed in the regimental headquarters.

**Question:** Let me ask two questions.

**Answer:** Yeah.

**Question:** You were how old now? You're 18, 19 years old you said?

**Answer:** No, how old was I? That was in '45. I was ... I was -- had turned 20 the previous November. I was born in '24.

**Question:** So you're still a pretty young kid.

**Answer:** Yeah. All of us were. Anybody who was over 25 was pappy.

## Tom Harwell

Tape 1 of 1

**Question:** So this will be two-part because I want to talk about your brother, cause I know -- but here's a 20 year old kid from -- and I can't remember where you grew up -- you grew up California? Or, no, where did you grow up?

**Answer:** Southern California -- both of us.

**Question:** Okay, as a 20-year-old kid you're in this landing boat and you're going into Iwo Jima. What's going on up here? What are you thinking? Do you know what you're in for?

**Answer:** I think we did. We were under fire. It was a hell of a lot of Jap artillery coming at us. They hadn't started mortars yet but a lot of machine gun fire. And we're in a little tin boat that wouldn't stop 50 caliber machine gun. Yeah. Your biggest problem is am I going to need new underwear before I get on the beach? Get in -- I've got a jeep. I'm in an LCVP, I got a radio jeep and there was a squad of us, probably ten guys in this jeep. We hit the beach and there are dead Marines everywhere, floating in the water. These guys had gone in just ten minutes before us. They dropped the ramp on the LCVP, dropped your ramp and he's not in very far. I take the jeep off, comes off of the ramp and I'm coming like balls out of hell, comes off the ramp and drops right in the water. That's as far as it went. If you get in a vehicle it's going to draw fire. We bailed out and got away from the jeep and about -- we'd gone up and dug in this soft black sand. And about five to ten minutes later, a mortar shell hits right in the middle of the jeep. Blows the jeep all to hell and the fun party of that -- I'm looking around and we're still, you know, we're close to the water. I'm looking around and I had a whole batch of letters in a pack in the jeep which I'd left in the jeep. And they're all floating up and down the damn water, everybody can pick up and read, okay, no big. Now, what do you think about? Beats hell out of me. I was worried more about my brother than anything else. He hadn't come in yet, but because I was going in on the 3rd wave and he would come in the 2nd day with regimental headquarters, I figured I'm one of the guys that's going to get tagged. Not him. We had set up a system cause he also was radio. We'd set up a system whereby I could call him, clandestine on a dummy code, and talk to him. No talk, just are you there, are you okay? And I never did -- was never able to raise him. He got hit too soon after he got on the beach -- they'd gone to the center, you know, because we had -- the 28th come in and by the time regimental headquarters got in, they had moved up to the center of the island and that's where they set up the CP. And he picked up a mortar in the CP. So first I knew about it was -- was the next day, I guess it was the next day, when a runner from the 28th, because they knew my brother and I were together when -- it was all the time. They sent a runner from the regimental headquarters of the 27th, 28th, to the 27th, to find out where I was. The 27th, of course, they knew I was weapons company, come down to get a runner to get me and I went up to the 28th to where my brother was killed. Follow by the name of Don Hanson, he's -- I think his picture's in there -- he went with me. And I really don't know -- I think that at the time of that I guess the big thing was how do I tell Mom, you know, my baby brother, a year a day.. a year a month and a day younger than me and he's also the youngest in the family. How do I tell her that I didn't take care of him? Which is bullshit, I couldn't take care of him, but these things go through your head. And from then on we just stuck, stayed with it until -- until they pulled us back -- we got the hell out of there.

**Question:** Now, you said you had a code?

**Answer:** Yeah, I don't remember what the call sign was, but I was -- I was going to -- cause I knew where he would be -- regimental headquarters. And I knew what the frequencies were. I'm going to come up on his frequency and break in with whatever the hell, call sign we made up. Then we would switch from there to a frequency that was on mine, a channel, and I don't remember what we'd set up. We'd set up some other channel, he would switch to that channel, I would switch to that channel, and we'd say, hey, how's it going? But

## Tom Harwell

Tape 1 of 1

it never worked out because he didn't get a chance to. I tried. I'd keep trying, but you know, I could never raise him.

**Question:** So did you live in constant -- did you ever think you were going to get it or did you put that out of your mind?

**Answer:** I really -- I don't really know. I never worried about it. I figured if somebody's going to get tagged it would be me because I'm going in first. And he's regimental headquarters, so normally you say, okay, the regiment's going to be -- they were -- for the first day they're back on the ship. So you say hey, there's going to be two guys going to be out here, and one of them's going to be back a ways and the other guy's going to be in the front. Who do you think's going to get clobbered? So I figured, okay, I'm going to get it -- I never figured I was going to be killed, but I figured I was going to get tagged. Didn't happen. I got tagged, but not hurt bad -- I got hit twice from mortar fragments. One of these little knee mortars went off in the soft sand right behind me. Knocked me flat on my butt, punched a hole in my leg, through a gas mask as a matter of fact, and then -- and then a few hours later I got another one that went off and a piece of frag hit my canteen. Went through the canteen into my butt -- and pieces of it still stuck in the canteen. Couldn't pull the canteen out. I had that canteen long long time, but I don't know whatever happened to it. Other than that it was fine, no problem.

**Question:** Did you realize going into -- of course, I mean I don't think you're thinking of this at the time because you didn't know -- I mean, did you even have the faintest idea before you went to Iwo Jima where Iwo Jima was?

**Answer:** Hell, no, never even heard of it. We didn't know anything about where we were going till we had been at sea, probably, for two weeks. After all maneuvers, we'd made landings and around, now, we had practiced landings in the islands, but until we got there, we found out when somebody had cut the piece out of a map and let it -- we found it on the weather decks. Some guy was -- was -- had the maps out and he had cut out of that this -- the name. And I don't know who it was picked it up -- wasn't me, but I saw it, and I thought what in the hell is that? Iwo Jima meant nothing to us. Why should it, you know?

**Answer:** Yeah. Did you realize why you were there after you were there? I don't think you might even be thinking about this, but, I mean what a big part of history. Was that --

**Answer:** No, we had -- by that time the Marines had been into Guadalcanal. That was the first Marine Division. They had been to Canal, they had been to Tarawa, and both of them -- Tarawa was great losses, not as big as Iwo, but, percentage wise. They'd been to Canal, they'd been to Tarawa, they'd been in Peleilu, after Iwo they went to Saipan-Tinian and then to Okinawa. So we -- we didn't -- it wasn't anything -- we didn't understand why, at the time, here we got three divisions of Marines going ashore for an island that's 3 x 5, so what the hell do we want this piece of shit for? At the cost it cost us. Well, we didn't know and later we found out, somebody told us or read it or President Roosevelt told us how great it was because we had done this. And what it was for was to get those -- those air, those airfields -- get them up and running for Air Force -- Air Corps bombers coming back from bombing runs. And I guess -- we were still there when they started landing. So somebody says, hey, great deal, you know. You lost 5,000 Marines, but look, you saved three different air crews from a B-17 in the first 48 hours it was open. I say big deal.

**Question:** Wow.

## Tom Harwell

Tape 1 of 1

**Answer:** Well, there was a strategic purpose in it. We were a nice country, because that -- that island could have been taken with no problem, waiting three days and dropping a little gas on it. But we believed in the Geneva Convention and the United States didn't do that. I'm glad they didn't. But anyway.

**Question:** So you were there 30-some days, 30 plus days.

**Answer:** I think it was 37 days but I couldn't say for sure.

**Question:** Now you've come off of this jeep, you get out of the jeep, you're running to save your life, now what's it --

**Answer:** You're not running to save your life. You don't -- if you get up you haven't got any place to run. Obviously you can't go back, the water's there. Besides that, the Navy took the boats away. The only place you can go is go forward. But you don't run, you get up and you crawl or you maybe make a short dash of 10 to 15 feet and drop into another hole, shell hole or whatever, and to hell the guy that's with you or that's covering you, or in my case I had the radio and hope in hell, my lieutenant was staying there, and then you make another dash until you keep moving up little bits at a time. You know, there -- we were in pretty heavy fire. Those Japs had been there for a hell of a long time. And they had every spot on that island was brought in. The guy was -- the commanding officer was an artillery officer, and he had plotted that entire island so he knew what to do, to bring gunfire, artillery fire to bear on any part of that island. Plus the mortars, plus everybody's in a hole, plus their rifleman. So you don't get up and run. If you're moving you're running, you bet your ass, but you aren't -- you haven't got far to go so it's not a big long run.

**Question:** So there's never -- there was never a feeling of chaos?

**Answer:** No, I don't think so.

**Question:** Very -- you knew what your job was.

**Answer:** I knew to keep my damn head down, and we had trained. And you get a bunch of guys. Remember the average age of the Marine was probably 20, 19 or 20, we'd been filled so full of bullshit that we were the best in the world, and I think we were. So we never worried about it. We were US Marines. Nobody could touch us. And incidentally we were faced with the Imperial Marines on Iwo. No big deal -- we're Marines they can't hurt us. They can't do a damn thing. We'll win. So you keep psyching yourself up with that BS but it works. And, we knew what our job was. Our job with the 37's was to support the infantry battalions with 37 millimeter fire. But it's awhile before we can get those guns into place, so in the meantime you're a rifleman. Every Marine is a rifleman. Our job was to -- where we hit on red -- one, I think, go straight across the island to the number one air field. Cut the island in two. We would turn to the north, the 28th who was in -- I think green beach was down below us. They would swing -- the division infantry would swing toward Suribachi because we were getting one hell of a lot of fire from Suribachi, and this was of course the place where the commanders were because they could see. Got the holes up there and he's up high and these damn Japs had outstanding optics, they run them up and looking right down your throat. Okay, so we had to get Suribachi secured. The 28th was doing that and that's where my brother got killed, when they got to the center before they turned to swing south. We headed north. Our job was to move over and push the Japs off the north end of the island. Now the 4th Marine Division, who's to the north of us -- they had two regiments on the beach, one regiment in reserve, we had two regiments on the beach which was 28th, 27th, 26th in reserve. And then the 3rd Marine Division was in reserve. So we were supposed to cut -- the

## Tom Harwell

Tape 1 of 1

27th was to swing north and to tie in with 4th -- whichever regiment of the 4th Marines come across the island and everybody swings and go to the north. This is the theory, this is the plan, and brush them off. Things never work like they're supposed to, but that's all right. We didn't tell the Japs what they were supposed to do. So they decided they didn't want to get pushed off so we had a little argument about that. Time goes on and then they landed the 3rd Division and I'm not sure when, but the 3rd -- we tied into the 3rd Division up toward the north end of the island. Matter of fact, the commanding general of the 3rd Division was up looking around and he run into where we were -- the 27th, in this particular case. The head of the weapons company -- we were with the 3rd, yeah, the 3rd Battalion. He's up looking around and he says what the -- something about who are you guys? Well, we're the 27th, who are you? Third Division. And I look and he's got a number eight, and you're identified with tags on your -- painted on. I don't know whether you know this, but, okay. The shape, half moon shape, was the 27th. A square... was, no the half moon shape was the 5th Division. The square was the 4th Division. The triangle was the 3rd Division. Okay. I look up, this guy's got a triangle painted on his dungarees, and whatever numbers starting with an eight. Eight said he was a general officer. Well, what in the hell is a general officer doing -- in fact I asked him. I said what are you doing up here, the lines are right here. They didn't know it; they were just wandering around. But anyway, that was the commanding officer of the 3rd, that was the first time we run into them. They'd come in on the beach. But we'd gone -- we'd gone north; we were over on, let's see, would have been the left side of the island. We were going north -- we was on the west side, west portion of the island past the second runway, and we're just holding, at that point in time. Holding because we'd -- we had bypassed a lot of canyons and Japs and that we were trying to thin out. We were tied in on our -- been on our left, on our left was the 4th Division, whatever their elements were, and we were there for three or four, five days, trying to get these guys out. In fact from there we went from there back down to the beach.

**Question:** During these 30 days --

**Answer:** Thirty-eight days.

**Question:** Thirty-eight days, living in fox holes? Were you living in fox holes?

**Answer:** Yeah.

**Question:** Did you sleep at all?

**Answer:** Well, you'd doze when you had a buddy that would stay awake. And if you didn't have a buddy that would stay awake, you stayed awake. Because you knew if you went to sleep, you were dead. If both of you went to sleep, because there was infiltration -- Japs were infiltrating through the lines or trying to, and you had to stay awake, one of you. Otherwise they'd walk up -- that's what happened to Smitty and LaBelle, right in the fox hole next door. Cause they didn't listen. One got killed, one got hurt. But, yeah.

**Question:** So you basically would cat nap?

**Answer:** Hm-hmm. Curl up in the fox hole, put your feet in the sweat band of your helmet and try to snooze a little bit.

**Question:** Food?

**Answer:** K rations. Food, the hot food we got was when we would get pulled back for awhile and run into a CB battalion. CB boys would take our -- when we could ten in ones or

## Tom Harwell

Tape 1 of 1

C-rations, they would take all of these and mix them together and fix us a hot meal. That happened maybe about three times in that 38 days.

**Question:** Wow.

**Answer:** But no big, you know. K rations were a good meal. Didn't like them, you know you had a little can of ham and eggs and three or four or five dog biscuits. Little piece of toilet paper and four cigarettes. I think that's about it.

**Question:** Wow.

**Question:** So for me, I'm sitting here thinking of being under that stress for that long a time and find some way to break it down into where -- every day becomes an average day? I mean does it? Is it a job? or --

**Answer:** Well, it's just another day I guess. I don't know. Hell, I'm 20 years old. I don't know anything about this head shrinking business. I did know that if me or whoever is in the fox hole with me or alongside of me doesn't keep their eyes open, we're going to be dead. So that's the point of the day is you -- don't give the bastards a chance. You shoot first if you can.

**Question:** Pretty strong motivation.

**Answer:** Yeah, you don't mind seeing blood but you don't want it to be yours.

**Question:** You were telling me a story about two guys that were supposed to be digging --

**Answer:** Okay. I mentioned before something about keep your eyes open, you had to stay alert. One guy -- most of us were two in the fox hole. One guy always looking to the front, covering your sector. The other guy could cat nap, doze, you want to stay in the hole or you get shot by your own people if you're up wandering around. Okay, had, in this particular instance, and this wasn't -- off the front, the Japs were making noise and they were down in front of us by probably 45 yards, 40, 45 yards. And they were either intentionally to bug us, but in any case would make a lot of noise. They were throwing grenades but they weren't reaching us. This is at night so they're banging -- of course this is a lot of it, keep you awake and bug you, I guess. They also had patrols out. Which, we did the same thing, probing. And there was a Jap patrol of three Japs. They had come up, and LaBelle and Smitty was in the fox hole right next to mine, big rock here then us. Off to their left was a machine gun that was to cover the front across there, if you can see it. They did a pretty good job of doing that. These three Japs, probing lines, get up and walk past on that rock, right up to LaBelle and Smitty's fox hole. Both these guys were digging. Both these guys were digging deeper, digging in. And I'd seen them doing it earlier and I said you guys, dig as deep as you want to but only one at a time, dig. Because you have to turn your back really, cause you're digging out here, putting the dirt in front of you to build up the bank. One at a time -- the other one keep your eyes forward. And they were kids. They didn't work for me but they were kids and I had been around for awhile, so I kept telling them. They forgot this and things were quiet so they're both down digging like hell and the Japs sneak through around, dropped a hand grenade in the fox hole. And damn near tore LaBelle's head off. Killed him, the whole side of his head off. And filled Smitty with fragments all through the front with this grenade. The Japs then, after this, I guess they thought that was all that facing them. They walked passed his which put them right between his fox hole, LaBelle's and Smitty's fox hole and mine. Biggs on the side of me and he couldn't do anything, and I was scared shitless, but what do you do? I stood up with a rifle and I started shooting as soon as I got the rifle up, probably waist high,

## Tom Harwell

Tape 1 of 1

I'm starting to shoot. And they're close. Close as me to you. And I went across and the first guy, I got him in the guts I guess. He went down, moved over to the second, which the three were in a line. Moved over to the second one, I shot and he went down. By that time I've got the rifle up to my shoulder and I got the other guy square between the horns, right in the old ring. They went down. And as I said before, when they fell, they fell into -- at least one of them fell into Smitty's fox hole. He's hit, hurt, and he's trying to push this dead Jap off of him. In the meantime I'm still standing up. Now I'm got the rifle back down, I'm looking around for what else going on, and I see this Jap move. I didn't get him. Opened fire again. Well that time I got Smitty. No big deal. Threw the arm, high fleshy part of the arm. He was hurting so damn bad from the frag he didn't notice that, but he did say, "God Damn, Harwell, knock it off, you're shooting me." So okay, I get back and then, and then, because he's hurt, I went over to the fox hole, and looked, help em. And they're, you know, 10, 15, 20 feet away. And I could see no help for LaBelle. His whole side of his face was blown away. But we got -- got Smitty out, Smith, W. R. Smith, got him out and over to our fox hole to care for him for the night. And it was probably like three or four o'clock in the morning. I don't know for sure. But we couldn't move at night, we couldn't move out of our fox hole over to -- at least that time, which was -- we were against a little bit of an embankment. Over this embankment on the other side was our platoon CP, command post. They were in definitely from the Japs. We were not. We were on the facing side. So we kept Smitty in the fox hole with us for two, three, four hours, trying to calm him down. Which we did, you know, gave him morphine and that cooled him down until we could get him over across the top of the other fox hole, get to CP so then the next day stretcher bearers come up, took him back to battalion aid station. And along with this, due to LaBelle's action taking the grenade, we, Bigg and myself and Decker, LaBelle was a young kid, 18 years old. Had a widowed mother. We wrote up what LaBelle did, saving Smitty in a fox hole with a grenade and all that and he got a Congressional -- he got a Medal of Honor awarded. I saw that afterwards and that was awarded to his mother, of course post-humously. I always -- that one kind of interested me.

**Question:** So you wrote that information up while this --

**Answer:** We set and wrote it out. Well, the next day I suppose, or the day after, but while we're still all right in the fox hole, right together and things had calmed down. No, I guess that was probably two days later because we had -- we brought tanks up and cleared out that mess in front of us that was stopping us from going and then there was a break, you know where you could stand up and walk around a bit. That's when we wrote it down or told it, I don't remember.

**Question:** Yeah, but I mean the war's still going on around you.

**Answer:** Oh, hell, yeah, the war's still going on. We're still on Iwo.

**Question:** Did you guys -- could you get mail? Did you have any contact with --

**Answer:** Oh, yeah, I was trying to figure out how we got it or when we got it. I think probably, I can't remember whether we got any or not.

**Question:** I was going to say I would imagine things were --

**Answer:** I can't remember whether we ever got any or whether we sent any. Because there was no way to get it up to us. We were interested, whenever they had troops coming up, supply coming up, we wanted ammunition and food. And I might add, that the Army Engineers had what they called ducks, which was a big truck, black, they were black. And

## Tom Harwell

Tape 1 of 1

they had guts, boy it was outstanding. They drove through that crap to bring us ammunition and food. Up to the Marines. I wouldn't have wanted to do it, but they did it.

**Question:** Now why did -- once the Army thought you had Iwo secured, if I understood right, they wanted to take your weapons away from you or something?

**Answer:** Ah, it wasn't the Army. It was the idiots that had been back on the beach all the time. Okay. This was, I think it was the 38th day. The night before we had pulled back to quote "rear area" like half a mile from where we'd been shooting each other, below the airport, the second air field. And had gotten us some hot food, Sea Bees, and some enterprising Sea Bees had built a toilet you could sit down on. No top, no nothing, just stools. And some other enterprising agent had brought a bunch of funny books. Hey, there's a chance to sit down, take a. So we're trying this except there was a couple of snipers up in the hills, Jap snipers who kept us from (inaudible). You'd sit down here, fortunately the guy wasn't a very good shot. But he would ping these damn shells into the toilet and we had to go back into the brush again. Okay, that night, and I think this was the 37th, 36th, 37th day, whatever. The last push from the Japs, Banzai type thing from the Japs, they were liquored up, and probably 200 of them come out of their holes, very few weapons, if any, except sabers, Samurai swords, and they moved down and hit the Air Force, Air Corps. Air Corps pilots were -- were -- had their tents up. This is how calm it was where they were. Tents up alongside the runway. The Japs came through, cut into the tents, and were really butchering the hell out of the Air Corps, who had at the best pistols, if anything. But not smarts enough to roll out of the way or whatever. So there was a lot of them got killed. Started raising hell and the Marine outfit that was still fully contained, fully armed, as a unit, was an outfit of the 5th Marines, engineers, they went up and of course they got around these Japs and just annihilated all of them, killed every damn one of them. The next day we -- well, we had gone down then, we had gone down that day that that happened. We get down there and the guy tells us this is a rear area. You have to turn in your ammunition. Said are you some kind of a nut? We're still here in sniper fire and you're wanting us to give up our ammo? Forget it. We wouldn't do it. No, of course we always kept our weapons. The Marines had weapons -- they always -- their own personal weapons they always had. We would not give up our ammunition. Neither did the 5th Marines. If they had they'd been in -- the engineers, they'd been in deep (inaudible). Air Corps would have been in deep (inaudible). But I don't know who passed that order. The Army took it over. The Army was on the beach but they weren't telling the Marines what to do. No chance would they tell us. But it came down through some, probably some 2nd lieutenant who had -- who had just got on the beach and he was going to tell these troops that -- we went through 2nd lieutenants and 1st lieutenants like there was no tomorrow. Tell us guys that, okay, give up your ammunition, turn in your ammunition. Said come on, man, because we were still carrying, we carried, we had the M-1's, we had 80 rounds in -- around our belt, ammo belt, and most of us carried two bandoleers. Cause you don't know when you're going to get more of it. (inaudible) BAR running around with bandoleers, BAR ammunition. I had a pistol. Had a nambu to start with and I traded that off. Then I had a 45, I had ammo for that. And we kept it, said no, we'll give you ammunition when we step on that damn LCVP to go back to the ship. Which we didn't. We kept it and got aboard this landing craft that was going to take us back to the ship, we handed these guys part of our ammunition. Spare bandoleers, and -- but we always kept some rounds just in case that ship had to go back to the beach again, no chance. Well we got back on the beach and headed back for Hawaii.

**Question:** Wow.

**Question:** Now did you -- you also went to Sabo, Japan, is that right?

## Tom Harwell

Tape 1 of 1

**Answer:** Sasebo.

**Question:** And this was after --

**Answer:** No, this was -- the war was over, we were combat loaded. This means that we're ready to go on the beach. And our program was that we -- the 5th Marine Division, was to hit Sasebo, southern Kyushu, the area on the beach. We set sail, the war was over while we were at sea en route to Sasebo for landing, for an attack. Instead of hitting the beach, we pulled up to the dock. Still combat loaded, still armed, we walked down the gangplank instead of going over the side into landing craft. We walked down the pier instead of going to the beach. Then when we had a chance, which we had quite a bit of chance -- we looked at what we were facing. There wouldn't have been a live Marine come off there. The Japs had us dead to rights. If -- if the war had not been over, if Truman hadn't dropped that bomb, see, we were slated to go in there whether he dropped the bomb or not because we didn't -- nobody knew we had the bomb. If he hadn't dropped that bomb, I have no idea how many Marines, but it would have been thousands and thousands. To say nothing of the Navy who would have got clobbered in their craft, and the Army that was also making these landings all at the same time -- it would have been no -- Japs had had hundreds of years to build up those defenses. Caves, facing the ocean. Caves going deep in. Pair of tracks run out. They'd run the guns out on the tracks, they'd fire right down your throat, pull the gun back in, no way to get him -- you couldn't -- you couldn't even put a skip bomb into those things. So saved our skin.

**Question:** Where were you when you heard the war was over?

**Answer:** I don't remember, somewhere between -- between Hawaii and Japan, aboard ship. We were loaded, ready to go, going, loaded, going.

**Question:** What was that like because we see all the news reel, you know.

**Answer:** What was it like? I don't really know, it was a kind of a happy time. Being aboard ship we didn't have anything to drink except maybe some guy, a squirl, like me, had put in his pack or his gear. So you drank what you had, the main thing you went on deck and lit a cigarette. Which you could not do. You couldn't smoke at night. You couldn't throw anything over the side, for obvious, reasons. When the war was over, it was all over with, we could smoke on deck, we could -- the Navy could dump their trash -- it was just a whole new world.

**Question:** It's interesting the things that become big. Now, so why couldn't you throw anything over board? Because that might --

**Answer:** Sub -- if you throw trash over the side, garbage or anything else, it stays there. And there's a trial, a ship's going along, a big trail, and here's a garbage. A sub comes along, cranks up his battery, he looks and here's that garbage. Goes back down, periscope above and he starts following the trail of garbage. Next thing you do is you got a torpedo up your smoke stack, so this is why, good reason, very good reason.

**Question:** So you go up and you could have a cigarette-

**Answer:** You could have a cigarette in the evening on deck, lights come on the ship, you know, all kinds of things. We went from a world, from a war standing, to a peace standing. All at once. People on the beach, went over and pulled their shades open and turned all their

## Tom Harwell

Tape 1 of 1

lights on. Which -- I wasn't in the States, but that's what they tell me. Black out curtains and all that sort of stuff, forget it, all at once.

**Question:** The day to day stuff -- (inaudible)?

**Answer:** Well, the way you would have had it was people like Ernie Pyle, and your combat correspondents. And not too many of those were too good because Pyle, of course being an exception. Most of them, wanted to stay back and talk to the officers back in the O Club. They weren't really interested in getting out and getting their butt shut off. So you didn't, and nobody, the war was over and nobody give a damn. At that time said let's just forget it. There was a few, a number, quite a number of books have been written but they're -- they're written from a different point of view.

**Question:** (inaudible)

**Answer:** Tom Clancey is a writer today. He writes books that are -- that are pretty much down to earth, you know. And some of his books that are biography, or fact, not fiction, he does get down into the -- but he still writes, for the most part, writing from the higher levels. His fiction books which are based on, most of them based on fact, they get right down to the nitty gritty. But you know, it's -- it just don't work that way.

**Question:** You talked about that the ships -- there was no liquor except for what somebody snuck on or something like that.

**Answer:** No, never in a Navy vessel. No booze on a Navy vessel with the exception of medicinal alcohol, which generally is whiskey, and that is held by the doctors, pharmacy officers. There's no -- US Navy does not permit alcoholic beverages aboard ship. Every Navy vessel that I have ever been on or close to, had alcohol aboard ship. But the Navy says no, so we knew this. We left Hawaii, we picked up booze, hid it -- nobody shook you down, so you had booze in your pack. They said be damn careful not to get -- not to let smell on your breath or not to get stomped or stupid, not to get in trouble, cause they you were in real trouble. But, yeah, we had booze, but not supposed to have.

**Question:** So you kind of snuck it on --

**Answer:** Snuck it on and in the middle of the night, or coming in off, if you happen to have been on a deck watch, coming in, you're colder of hell, you could take a shot of it, no big deal.

**Question:** What about -- you know, again, the perception for someone that's younger is you, know Bob Hope out entertaining the troops and USO shows. Now you were out fighting a war. Did you ever --

**Answer:** Well, Bob Hope shows -- he did -- he did have shows, never one where I was that I can remember. But Bob Hope was probably the -- the number one comedian, entertainer, in the eyes of the military, definitely the eyes of the Marines. Cause he was into Okinawa, he was into Guadalcanal, he was into Saipan and things were still pretty smoky when he was there. He was, Bob Hope among all of them, many of them -- the problem of USO shows. Now you may want to take this out. The biggest problem of USO shows was that they were a bunch of entertainers, actresses to be. They would like to be. They would come out to quote entertain the troops. They'd put on a short program -- song and dance thing, then they were gone. They went to the O club, they never had anything to do with the enlisted man. They went to the O club, and as far as we were concerned, they were bed

## Tom Harwell

Tape 1 of 1

partners for the officers. Whether they were or not I don't know. But they always went to the O club. Saw some pictures in there that I had in Alaska where we had -- I can't remember that gal's name, but anyway, this was a case in point. She's there and takes the pictures with the troop, well, in fact, one of our guys, Sergeant Kilgore was taking the pictures. She takes all these pictures and then she has a song and dance act or something that takes 30 minutes, and she's gone. She went up to the -- to the, fact, our colonel, Colonel Marger, who was provost Marshall, he had -- his quarters were pretty much the Marines officers club. She went up there. We never saw her again. She entertained the officers, not the men. And so we says hey, come on, you know. Well you get some guy that entertains the troops, not because -- not because it's going to do him any good but because he can do somebody else some good. It's entirely different from these -- from these wannabe actresses, primarily actresses, that would go out on the USO tour to get their name known. Free publicity. There was a lot of them, but basically that was the differences in them and I'd seen this difference and so when you look at this blond, and I guess Bob Hope shows, there's no comparison.

**Question:** Now when you look in retrospect, your time in the service as a part of your full life, was a very short time.

**Answer:** Five years, almost five years.

**Question:** But yet, and I'm making an assumption here from other vets I've talked to -- you made some very unique friendships.

**Answer:** Yeah, yeah, I did but I didn't keep up too much after the war was over. We scattered pretty well. Some of the best friendships I made, they didn't survive. One of them, Dale, name of Dale Brazel from Redding. He -- his father was president of the bank there. Dale had two years college but I'm not sure, Cal State, whatever. I met Dale in Alaska, Kodiak, we become very good friends and we stayed in touch until Dale -- he went in the 6th Marines. Well, he was at the time in Alaska, but he went in the 6th Marine Division and was killed in Okinawa. I went by to see his father, but wasn't able to, in Redding. So there was another guy, a fellow by the name of Abernathy. We called him Spike, and he lived in Chicago. I run into him in '47 or '48 and stuff, see. We had one guy that was local, that after the war he become a drunk and I didn't want him around my kids. But friendships, yeah, but there wasn't -- there wasn't enough of us really and we were spread so wide that --. Okay, Kilgore, he was down at the desert out of Kachela (?) and a fellow name of Chapalier, both of them, both Marines, both at the same in Alaska, they were down on the desert. I talked to Kilgore on the phone one time, I think I saw Chapalier, one time. In the ensuing years. And that was probably in early '50's -- late '40's or early '50's. I don't know. I know that a lot of guys developed buddies, buddy system that was -- last them a lifetime. But I didn't. I don't know whether -- whether any of my comrades did or not. They have all these reunions. I've never been to one. Course I've never been to a high school reunion, either. So I don't really know.

**Question:** So when you were done, were you done? I mean, the war was over and --

**Answer:** The war was over and no I wasn't really done. I went to San Jacinto and they formed a National Guard unit. Fellow name of Robinson, Ted Robinson, who was commanding officer of the National Guard unit, I knew him. He said hey, we need to get a cadre here to train these guys. Got a bunch of kids and we need to train them. So he got about five or six of us -- I was the only Marine that had -- had combat experience -- to join the National Guard, which I did. With the provisos, if mobilized, we're discharged. We've served our time, we don't want to go overseas, we'll help you train. And it worked out. Couple of guys stayed in and went. George -- two fellows named George -- one was a lieutenant, one was a first

## Tom Harwell

Tape 1 of 1

sergeant. They stayed in by choice. I got out just before they went to Korea. But I figured, okay, you know, I learned something. If I can keep these kids from getting themselves killed, it's worth it. so I joined the National Guard but I was -- when the war started I was discharged from the Guard and not -- never gone back -- never looked back.

**Question:** Do you think or would you like there to be a message from World War II for future generations?

**Answer:** Yeah. Anybody that thinks that this is the war to end all wars has got rocks in their head. I don't know what the message would be. I don't -- I don't have any real thoughtful philosophy to -- to impart to anybody. We've always had wars, I'm afraid we're always going to have. I mean, hopefully they won't be major world wide conflicts. But you know if you get -- if your son or grandson is in the service and he goes to someplace like Somalia, or he goes to XYZ country, you go in there as peace keeper, or you go in there as a small group, you go into Nicaragua, or to Haiti to assist -- to put down a rebellion, whatever, and you get killed, that's a big war. It's just as big a war as World War II was, if you were killed or if your brother was killed. That was a big war. So as I said, we're always going to have wars. And we've seen that. Desert Storm. That's a war. We're always going to have them, so what we hope, now this is -- gets into I guess, political, but my personal philosophy, the biggest thing that worries me is that every time that a war is over, a major conflict is over, we get an administration that wants to cut the bone. So that you no longer have the capability, to wage a war. We don't wage wars because we're -- we're trying to gain something. We wage wars to prevent losing something. And they always cut it back to zero. Reagan was an example. He built up, what Carter had taken down. And Carter was a military man. He was a commander in the Navy and he was nuclear trained, he was submarine commander. He goes in as president, but then again, whether this had anything to do with his -- his born-again religion or whatever, but he cut the military right to the bloody bone. Reagan comes in, he starts building it up again. Our Navy. You know, you cut the Navy down and -- and -- where you can't man your ships. This is -- this is terrible. The American people don't want that. Of course right along with that we also don't want -- we don't want our military to have to be on welfare, either, so my philosophy is that if we maintained strong, not over strong, but strong solid military, and strong solid military leaders, we aren't going to have to fight so damn many wars. But if we go down the hill, Russia. More of my philosophy. Russia was a rather strong military organization but their -- their method of government, communism, was a poor way to maintain it, so they kept going down hill in their military. They broke up the USSR and all of these little groups went out and broke off, Chechen is a good example. Chechen gets -- they're unhappy about something. So they start a war with Russia. And the paper today, Russia is sending troops to Chechen. And look at these troops, they're 15, 16-year-old kids. No training, no nothing. They're going out. Now that kid gets killed, that kid's mother, Chechen, the war in Chechen to prevent succession, is very bit as important as World War II was to that mother. My philosophy -- don't let your military get down to where they are incapable of providing the necessary -- the necessary support for our Constitution. Okay. Talk about your freedom and whatever, but they say freedom isn't free, we all know that. But if you're in administration, let's the thing, the military go to hell in a hand basket, you're out in left field. You still have to respond and you respond with 16-year-old kids that have neither the equipment nor the training, then we're in trouble. Okay.

**Question:** So in other words you're saying keep a military that's strong enough so we don't even have to go to war.

**Answer:** Exactly. And I'm not saying that we have to have a wartime footing. I'm not saying that we have to have a military of 12000 people. We have to have enough of a military to support, adequately support the requirements that our nation has in the world. And the

## Tom Harwell

Tape 1 of 1

equipment and the training. And in the event, and of course, enough -- pay these kids enough so they'll stay in. And in the event that we cannot do this with the -- with the volunteer forces, I'm saying let's draft them, if necessary. Because we can't let it drop back down to zilch.

**Question:** Are you proud of your time in the military?

**Answer:** Absolutely. Without a question. No question. I'm proud of everything that -- that the military has done. Not just mine but everybody else's. I was proud of the American people until Viet Nam, at which time -- and I have to take some blame, for the Americans. The Americans ignoring the Viet Nam veterans. Abasing them. Because I belong to the American Legion and I belong to VFW. And neither one of us -- neither group, nobody, went down to the docks and says hey fellows, welcome home. You get some A-hole that is making all this noise, we should have thrown him over the God-damn side. Veterans could have done that. But we didn't. We let those boys come home and I have -- I have son-in-laws -- that's a Viet Nam veteran. We let them come home and they had done an outstanding job. Whether the war was right, wrong or not, has absolutely nothing to do with the fact that that kid was over there doing what he was told to do. He come home a hero. What did we do? Shit on him.

**Question:** Just as you were over doing what --

**Answer:** Exactly. But when we got home we were heroes.

**Question:** I know.

**Question:** When you got done with World War II, did you leave with a hatred to those people or were you fighting a war against a country or --

**Answer:** Wait a minute, hatred to which people?

**Question:** To the Japanese that were shooting at you.

**Answer:** Yes. I had a -- I had a high animosity because they killed my brother. I realize the guys were doing their job like we was doing ours. But I also had run across the Japs in combat that were fanatics, real fanatics. We were not fanatics. Of course their ideas -- we were told this. The Japanese want to die for their Emperor. You're Marines. You help them. Okay. But my brother was killed, so I had animosity. I'm not sure it's not still there, that's from 50 years ago. Example, off the record. My wife worked for a bank in California. It was Southern California First National Bank. It was bought by the Japs. They re-named it --we wanted to re-name it Yankee Bankee but they wouldn't let them. But it become California First Bank. I had animosity toward those Japs that were running that bank, young, most of them were young, they come in, they'd never been in the service. But I couldn't help, but push it over some animosity. And you know, I'm an old man, I'm 75 years old. I probably will die still feeling some animosity which I shouldn't. There's no reason I should. Little kids, why should I have any animosity to them. Why should I sit back and say yeah, but they're going to grow up to be Japs. You know, that's dumb, that's totally dumb. But you can't take your brain out and rinse it off. No. There's a picture in there of the 5th Division cemetery, 4th Division had one too. Fifth Division cemetery on Iwo Jima. And there was, I think about 5000 Marines in that cemetery, a batch of them. My brother was one of them. I look at the picture and then it's pretty hard for me to look at that picture and say hey, the Japs are nice, really a bunch of nice people. Yet when I was in Japan, occupation in Japan, we fed the Jap kids. We took no crap.