

Don Sehmel

Tape 1 of 2

Question: What is your name?

Answer: Don Adolph Sehmel.

Question: Where and when were you born?

Answer: I was born in my grandmother's house in Puyallup, August 14, 1925.

Question: When did you end up out this way towards Gig Harbor?

Answer: My folks lived here all the time. They just went over to my grandmother's house, my mother did to bear me.

Question: To have a baby, so you were born at home. Yeah, my dad was the same way.

Answer: Right.

Question: What did your dad do out here?

Answer: He ran a small chicken farm and was a heavy equipment operator for Pierce County. Bulldozers, and graders, etc.

Question: So what was it like growing up in Gig Harbor?

Answer: Well, it was very nice. I enjoyed it. I went to Gig Harbor Union High School. Played football and that was the only sport that I turned out for and I was secretary treasurer of my freshman class and president of my junior class and at the end of my junior year why we were at war so I went in the marine corp.

Question: Was there a hang out for high school kids in Gig Harbor at that time? What did you do as a kid? How has life changed?

Answer: Well, occasionally we would go to movies and movies cost a dime and we would walk in from Rosedale, which was 5 1/2 miles. I was a Boy Scout. I hunted and fished and there was no hang out place.

Question: Where was the movie house?

Answer: Right down town Gig Harbor.

Question: Is it still there?

Answer: No it's a vacant lot at the present time.

Question: So, when did you hear about, or do you remember hearing about Pearl Harbor?

Answer: On December 7th, I and a friend of mine were duck hunting and when we came in about noon or 1 o'clock we heard about the Japanese bombing Pearl Harbor and we had been expecting it however, at least that was my feeling, we had been preparing for war.

Question: So you were pretty aware of world events.

Don Sehmel

Tape 1 of 2

Answer: Right, I have always been interested in world events and was at that time and knew about the ultimatum that Roosevelt had given to the Japanese so we were sort of expecting it. We weren't expecting the surprise attack like what happened but the fact that we were at war with Japan was not a surprise.

Question: How old were you?

Answer: I was 16 at the time.

Question: And you decided at 16 now what were you going to do now that we were at war?

Answer: I wanted to enlist in the marine corp but my dad wouldn't let me. My mother died when I was twelve years old and so my dad and I bached together for 3 or 4 years and he wouldn't sign for me then but I did sign up with the home air raid wardens or whatever it was called. And we put in I think it was two hour shifts or maybe four hours in a little shack out in the boon docks and if we heard any air planes we would call in a central place and tell them there was a plane going over and what direction. And I kept nagging my dad about going in the marine corp and finally after school was out that spring why in August he says ok, so on the 7th of August I left for San Diego.

Question: So you are still sixteen years old, you just finished your junior year in high school.

Answer: All I needed for graduation was one credit which was US history and after I'd been overseas about a year I received a letter from my dad that said they had graduated me with my class because being in the service was equivalent to US history I guess.

Question: Pretty realistic history.

Answer: It was.

Question: So here you are sixteen years. I think of me at sixteen. I was an idiot. I mean I was just a little kid, but to imagine a 16 year old child at that time, I mean you were a young man, going to boot camp. What was that like?

Answer: It was an experience that lives with me to this day. When we arrived at San Diego and got off the train we were told form in a line. They had yellow foot prints where we were to stand and a Marine corporal got us all joined up and we poured into a truck and went to the San Diego Marine Base. And when we came in all the boots that had been there a couple more weeks than we had were yelling, you'll be sorry, you'll be sorry, and we were. But it was a tough, good experience. If you did what you were told you didn't get into trouble and I handled it well.

Question: Is it like you see in the movies? In the movies you get stripped down and they check you and probed and how do they take you through all that?

Answer: The first evening we were in barracks and we had to give up all of our clothes and anything that had been in our pockets such as pocket knives or watches or anything and then they ran us as a group down to get some skivvies and that was all we got that first night. And then the next day we ran through the medical deal for shots and all that kind of stuff and gradually the next day they gave us our fatigue uniforms.. and every boot got a bucket with a scrub brush and a marine corp manual and several other items that would be used for

Don Sehmel

Tape 1 of 2

personal grooming. And it wasn't until we got out of boot camp that we found out we were charged for that. I think it was about \$4 which was about a week's pay and anyhow the boot camp is still a memory in my mind.

Question: Now a bucket and a scrub brush. That is the first time I've heard that. You were given a scrub brush and that was for

Answer: Scrubbing your clothes and a Marine corp manual which you had to study which had your general orders, the history of the marine corp and everything like that and it had a plastic soap container box, toothbrush, toothpaste, and I imagine that was about it. And then they gave us, the second day I think, we all formed into platoons, which were sixty men to a platoon and went to the barbers and got our hair cut which was a complete skin job. And then the training commenced and it was rough and tiresome and very very strong on the discipline. Our drill instructor was a corporal and you couldn't speak to him except in the evening when we were finished with our day's training, and then you would have to stand at attention and say recruit Sehmel wishes permission to speak to the corporal if you had something you wanted to talk to him about and that was the way it was.

Question: Do you remember your corporal's name?

Answer: I sure do. Kolwalski. A Pollock from the south side of Chicago and he was in my mind a perfect example of a marine DI. Well built, strong, tough, and he was tough on us but I will say fair. I would like to see him but he is probably dead now.

Question: Was he a seasoned veteran or was he a year or two older than you?

Answer: Oh, I would imagine he was probably 20 or 21 and had probably been in the marine corp for maybe a year or so, maybe longer, I don't know. He didn't have a hash mark I know that. He was the assistant DI and the regular DI was a sergeant and most of our training was from the assistant DI.

Question: Were you an old sixteen or a young sixteen?

Answer: I was an old sixteen.

Question: So you were mature for your age?

Answer: I think so, I was six feet tall and

Question: You could hold your own?

Answer: I could hold my own.

Question: See I mean, I think about boot camp, knowing I'm going to go to war. I couldn't even go to summer camp without getting home sick so I can't imagine these young kids your age.

Answer: Well, really we were kept so busy. Our days usually started about four in the morning and ended at ten at night and we didn't have a lot of time to get home sick.

Question: How long was boot camp do you remember?

Don Sehmel

Tape 1 of 2

Answer: Boot camp was eight weeks. There were three weeks of troop and stomp and discipline training and recruit depot and then we went out to camp Matthew's which was in the San Diego area also and had three weeks of rifle training and then back to the main base and had two weeks more of scrimmages and infantry training and stuff like that.

Question: Did you train hand to hand combat and things like that?

Answer: Oh yeah, yeah.

Question: Do they toughen you up pretty good?

Answer: Oh you betcha. You were in good shape when you got out of boot camp.

Question: Now during the main part of boot there was no leave right?

Answer: No leave, no candy, no soda pop, no opportunity to go to the PX or anything like that, you were there to train.

Question: Now while you were in boot were there people that had seen action that you were talking to?

Answer: No.

Question: There hadn't been any real action yet, other than the Wake Island deal which happened at the beginning and the last of the Philippines. That was the only thing that had taken place. It was coincidental that the day I joined the Marines was the day the first division landed on Guadalcanal however, the 7th of August, 1942.

Question: In retrospect looking back, did you have the faintest idea what you were getting into?

Answer: Well, I don't think anyone can visualize what they were getting into. I knew I was going overseas and fight Japs but that was the extent of what I knew.

Question: The reason I ask that is we talked to a tail gunner over in Newport he said you know in all my training never once did they say they were going to be firing back at us.

Answer: They told us that in boot camp. It was pretty good training and there was no holding back on racism as far as Japanese were concerned, it was you're going to be killing Japs. We want you to learn how to kill Japs.. and you know they had us well indoctrinated.

Question: That is a big part of it.

Answer: Sure it is and then later on when we were in rest camps in between campaigns why over the mess hall there was a sign saying kill Japs. I don't know if they would do that now. If they were training, it would be politically incorrect I suppose.

Question: Now growing up here. I know up on Bainbridge Island there is a big Japanese population, and the valleys over by Kent.

Answer: There weren't any but I had no particular animosity towards the Japs, the Japanese-Americans, in our football league we played Fife which had a lot of Japanese and they were good players.

Don Sehmel

Tape 1 of 2

Question: So you could kind of separate Japs, the enemy, and Japs the Americans.

Answer: Yeah, I did.

Question: From boot camp where did you progress to?

Answer: From boot camp went to a camp out in the desert, in the Imperial Valley, California, a place called Niland, and we trained there for approximately two months and then back to San Diego to camp, can't think of it right now, my short term memory is getting bad.

Question: I have the same problem. Each camp has different training?

Answer: Right, right.

Question: So at Niland, what were they training you for?

Answer: At Niland we were trained on one-oh-five artillery pieces.

Question: For those novices, what is a one-oh-five?

Answer: It is a 105-millimeter howitzer, cannon in common words.

Question: So that is about how big of a shell?

Answer: About 4" in diameter, a little over 4", and the projectile weighs about 33 pounds.

Question: Is a howitzer trailered?

Answer: It's mounted on two wheels and it was pulled by a ten wheeled truck which was a 2 1/2 ton truck.

Question: So at Niland you learned how to fire the one-oh-five, then moved on to another camp.

Answer: Camp Elliott was the other name in the San Diego area to receive higher training and there to school on mortars and machine guns and of course compass work and all that kind of stuff.

Question: Were you a serious student? Did you know your life depended on it?

Answer: Well I would say I was a good student, in fact, I think that is why I came home because I trained well, I paid attention in training, and I know of friends and people that got killed that you never know why but they either were doing something they shouldn't have been in some cases and they, like walking in the sky line, and you never know.

Question: That's a (inaudible) movie. He was a marine on Iwo Jima and he was talking about guys they said you get in your fox hole and stay in your fox hole and some of the guys didn't listen and when one is digging the other'd be watching. He lost a couple.

Answer: The training was designed to try to keep you alive and I think it helped.

Don Sehmel

Tape 1 of 2

Question: Then where did you ship out to then?

Answer: Then we shipped out from San Diego and went down way south to Valparaiso, Chili. We were an alone ship and then headed across and landed in Melbourne, Australia, and joined the first Marine Division there. They had been relieved from Guadalcanal because they were in non-combat condition after five months on Guadalcanal. The ones were in pretty bad shape from lack of food which is surprising for American troops but that was the condition on Guadalcanal and I would say about half the division had malaria at the time and we were integrated into the division and started training again. Had good liberty in Australia and went on a 40-mile hike I still haven't forgotten, that wasn't a common distance, but we did do one 40-mile hike and that stands out in my memory.

Question: You are all of seventeen?

Answer: I was seventeen then, and we got in Australia in February of 1943 and had my 18th birthday in Australia and we left Australia I think about around the first part of September and went to New Guinea.

Question: Now when you were in Australia you said there was some leave time.

Answer: Over night liberty.

Question: Were you a tourist?

Answer: No. We were limited to, the regiment I was in was stationed at (Beret?) And when we were on liberty could go anyplace in Beret but couldn't leave the area. No knowing that Beret was a very very famous gold strike area until after the war, I wish I had known it then because prospecting has always been a hobby of mine.

Question: So where did you go on leave?

Answer: Just downtown. We were stationed in the middle of Beret in Victoria Park. That is where we were stationed. We'd walk out the gate, and for a penny catch a tram and ride down to (inaudible) street and buy gin squashes and beer and go to dances.

Question: They were dance clubs?

Answer: No they were just I imagine they were dances put on so the servicemen had a place to go but they weren't organized clubs or anything like that.

Question: Did the women like the American Marines?

Answer: Oh you betcha they did. We, In the first place the reason they liked the American Marines or the Marines period, all the young Australians were over in Africa fighting Rommel. They were part of the British forces there, and so we being young virile Americans made it a point to try to treat the Australian women nice and let them know what they were missing.

Question: Did your patriotic duty?

Answer: We did we had a good time there.

Question: Then you went to New Guinea?

Don Sehmel

Tape 1 of 2

Answer: Yes, we did. New Guinea for more training, although we did get bombed there a lot and practically every Sunday watch big air battles that were going on overhead because it seemed just like clockwork that on Sundays the Japs were going to come and bomb. We'd watch those intently any time a plane came down, we'd yell, American or Jap it didn't make any difference you know you couldn't tell at the distance they were up there anyhow when one came down we would cheer.

Question: Was it plane to plane combat going on?

Answer: Dogfights. They'd be, oh it seemed like planes all over the sky, but I imagine there were probably 30 to 40 Americans and the same amount of Japs and the Japs would be escorting the bombers and there would usually be 20 to 30 bombers.

Question: Was it real at that time?

Answer: Well you knew that somebody was getting killed when the plane came down but it really didn't, maybe it was my feeling, I don't know, but it didn't seem like myself and the group of guys I was with, we'd stick in our hole and watch it, but it wasn't a great deal because we weren't actually involved with shooting back or anything.

Question: It was far enough away.

Answer: I guess so.

Question: Did you travel with the same group of guys as you moved along.

Answer: After I joined the first division I was with the same bunch other than the ones that got killed or wounded or got shipped out until the end of the war.

Question: Do you remember who some of your closest buddies were?

Answer: Oh yeah.

Question: Who were some of the closest guys to you that?

Answer: Walt Carroll, Moe Porterfield he got killed, and Geiger and Newman and a number of others.

Question: Were they from all over?

Answer: From all over yeah. The only one that I remembered from Washington state seemed like most of them were from Georgia, Texas, Louisiana, Carolinas.

Question: What were your duties? What were you trained to do?

Answer: I was trained to be a forward observer. A forward observer in.. my outfit was an artillery outfit and the actual forward observer was generally the lieutenant and there would be a team of 3 or 4 enlisted men with that lieutenant that would be assigned to various infantry outfits and the lieutenant, however we were all trained in case he got killed to direct the fire and you did that by either radio or telephone lines strung along the deck or dirt and when for example when an infantry outfit needed artillery fire if there were targets out there either a group of enemy soldiers or tanks or trucks or whatever the observer would look on

Don Sehmel

Tape 1 of 2

his map and radio or telephone back to the fire direction center that you wanted a ranging round and give the coordinates to the best of your knowledge map coordinates and they'd shoot around it white phosphorous which would make a big cloud of white smoke and from that you would see if your target you wanted to hit was maybe 400 yards to the left you'd say move her 400 yards to the left. And if the round was 400 yards short generally on the first round you'd make sure it was plenty long and say down 400 yards or whatever and then shoot another one and if it was close to the target you wanted you'd say fire for effect and they would turn her loose.

Question: So did you volunteer to be an observer or what?

Answer: No I was assigned. At first I was assigned in the first campaign. The instrument section was the section in an artillery battery that did all the fire control and the observing and everything and that happened to be where I was assigned when I got overseas from the states, and later on in other campaigns I would volunteer for the position because I had experience in it and I sort of enjoyed it.

Question: Now if I understand right you're out front.

Answer: That's right.

Question: A couple of guys and you've got a couple of popguns with you.

Answer: Three or four of us depending upon whether there was three enlisted and one lieutenant. We would be assigned to the infantry companies that were doing the attack.

Question: So where did you see first action?

Answer: Cape Gloucester, New Britain.

Question: Describe the environment to me.

Answer: Well the environment was, I don't know how to describe it, very very dense jungle. It was in one of the wettest places on earth. Every day there would be monsoon rains and then rains would stop and then ten or fifteen minutes the ground would be steaming from the heat from the sun and that's about all there is to describe.

Question: So it was muggy, hot.

Answer: Even when it was raining deluging, it would be hot warm rain. We'd sleep in our foxholes at night. All we had was a poncho which we'd wrap around us. We'd usually lay in warm water most of the night and one of us, there'd be two men to a hole and one would stay awake for two hours while the other slept. And then you would sleep and the other guy would be awake for two hours throughout the night. That's the way the lines were.

Question: Flat, mountainous?

Answer: Basically the jungle was so thick that our attack on the airport facilities the main attack was perhaps an area of 2 to 300 yards in from the water's edge. There had been a we'd call it a trail, probably call it a jeep trail. It was passable by a jeep or a tank but because of the thickness of the jungle you didn't have to worry too much about your flank or flank attacks so the attack on the airport was mainly an attack up 2 to 300 yards width along the ocean to the airport.

Don Sehmel

Tape 1 of 2

Question: So tell me what you had on gear wise?

Answer: Hum, as you can see in that picture we had a little pack about 12" square, maybe 12 x 14, and in that you'd have maybe a little extra ammunition, you'd have several C-ration cans and a couple pairs of socks, and that would be about it I guess. And attached to that pack you would have your entrenching tool which was a little shovel about so long, and you carried a machete and then your cartridge belt with two canteens on it and a medical pack of with they call them battle packs, it was a big wad of gauze to try to block bleeding if you got hit.

Question: I know someplace they carried morphine tablets and things.

Answer: No, but we had navy corpsman that served with the marines as our medics and they all had morphine syrettes and when you got wounded why the corpman would.. sometimes an individual, sergeants or others of higher rank had the syrettes also.

Question: Now you weren't yourself carrying a radio or did you have a radio operator with you?

Answer: We had a radio operator with us which was one of those 3 or 4 enlisted men that I was talking about. I carried telephone wire which was heavy.

Question: A spool?

Answer: Right.

Question: The radio operator had to be connected by a landline, am I right?

Answer: No the radio operator could converse when the radio worked by wireless by radio, however the telephone lines were so frequently disrupted either by tank treads or amphibian tractor treads or cut by Japs or in other words the wire was a good method of communication if it wasn't cut, but if it was then you had a radio theoretically that the radioman would be able to communicate. Hopefully one of the two systems would be in working order when you needed it.

Question: So you're walking through the jungle and you've got this big spool like an extension cord and you're laying phone wire down as you.

Answer: You just let it spool out, but we had, there were two types of wire. There was the big drums and fortunately I never had to carry one of them. There was another wire called a battle wire, which was a very light rubber coated wire perhaps like that going to your camera there, that wasn't as heavy and I don't remember how many feet were on a spool, but I would imagine there was a half a mile or so and as you move forward you just let it spool out behind you. You'd try to flip it over on some bushes or something to the side where a tank coming by where a tank coming by or a jeep wouldn't screw it up and break it.

Question: Seems like you'd have wire running all over the place.

Answer: Very frequently there were a lot of wires.

Question: It also seems there is a plus and a minus to it. The minus being if I follow that wire I'm going to find somebody at the other end of it if I'm your enemy.

Don Sehmel

Tape 1 of 2

Answer: That's right, but generally as you're progressing you've taken care of any of the enemy, however, there were cases where some got overlooked and could clip them. I know at Guadalcanal we went out to repair wire where it had been clipped by the Japs.

Question: So sometimes you would get clipped and somebody would have to go back and splice it together.

Answer: Yep yep.

Question: Just the logistics of it sounds like a nightmare, I mean this jungle environment and running this wire around.

Answer: In some cases this jungle environment where there had been, where the enemy had a machine gun or something, or where a trail block or something, we would call in the artillery and then of course the artillery would smash the jungle. There'd be trees and it'd be a mess.

Question: Do you remember the first day you called in your coordinates?

Answer: Yeah, that was a place called that later was called Hell's Point. It was probably the largest battle of the campaign that we were involved in up to that point I would say. We landed on Christmas Day and I think this was probably the 28th of December, the 28th or 29th. The Japanese had a major defensive position that was Hell's Point, which was probably a quarter of a mile prior of getting to the airport and that was the main battle that I remember and they used a lot of artillery there.

Question: So, how far behind was your artillery?

Answer: The artillery was back probably 4-5 miles.

Question: So you have to get communication 4-5 miles back and then you start going in.

Answer: You asked about radios then, in this battle of Hell's Point, the radio jeep got mired on a log that was sticking up in the stream and I wasn't a jeep driver or radioman but as it turned out I volunteered to try to get the jeep out of the stream and I did and got it to where the lieutenant could use it.

Question: And you were under fire?

Answer: Yeah, I got a minor decoration for it.

Question: What were you thinking then, I mean, because that's what does your mind do in that situation. Here is the jeep stuck, they are firing at you, that is your communications, what goes on in your head?

Answer: Well, the main thing was to get the jeep out and hope to hell that you get it out safely. It is strange to someone that has not been in a situation like that. I don't know what it is, but you do it, and one of the reasons you do it is because you don't want to let your outfit down, you don't want to let your buddies down and you just do it.

Question: Is fear a factor?

Don Sehmel

Tape 1 of 2

Answer: Fear is a factor to an extent. Sometimes fear is a factor when it shouldn't be and when it should be, it isn't. I can remember that first day I was fearful because my heels were about ten feet from the water's edge and I was fearful of a counter attack, where was I going to go, and, see, that was probably needless fear because a counter attack didn't happen and I should have probably been more fearful when I was getting the jeep out of the creek but I wasn't as I recall.

Question: What kind of fire were you taking when the jeep was - artillery or sniper?

Answer: No, it was mortar and machine gun and of course the whole area was under sniper fire and sniper fire is another soldier shooting his rifle at you, that's what sniper fire is.

Question: Could you see, I mean I know with your binoculars and choosing your locations, but when you're going through the jungle, I mean do you think every leaf moving was somebody out there cause it seems like in the jungle warfare they could be right there.

Answer: I never saw a Jap in New Britain. The main percentage that were killed were killed by artillery fire but even the rifleman would see a puff of smoke and he'd shoot and it was difficult and many of my friends said they didn't see any Japs but they did a lot of shooting. Now it was completely different in some of the other campaigns.

Question: You went from there to?

Answer: We landed on Christmas Day on 1943 on New Britain and we stayed there until April. The campaign for all practical purposes was probably over by the first half of February but we were still there, and then we were actually a part of the 6th army which was under Mac Arthur and at that time the navy wanted us back and there was a big fight going on between Nimitz and Mac Arthur about the 1st marine division going back to the navy command. And Mac Arthur didn't want to give us up but he was made to give us up so we went back to an island called Pavuvu, which was about 60 miles north of Guadalcanal for a rest area and when we got there, there was nothing there. The colonel that decided that would be our rest area had flown over in a small one-engine plane and seen the rows of coconuts and that would be a good place for marine rest area. The main reason they didn't want to put us down on Guadalcanal as a rest area at that time the island commander decided that any outfit that bivouacked on Guadalcanal had to furnish work parties for various functions that had to be done for the island command and our division commander said no. He says we're not going to go to any place where, we would be required to provide a thousand men a day working detail and so he stuck us in Pavuvu which many marines remember of the 1st division remember Pavuvu perhaps better than the combat islands because it was absolutely nothing there and we'd just came out of 3 or 4 months of living in the boon docks and combat, and were supposed to make our camp which we did. We did finally get tents so we had tents but it was extremely primitive in this coconut plantation where we made our camp which was owned by Lever Brothers. It had not been utilized for anything for a year or two so it was coconut fronds and coconuts and all over the place well we burned the fronds and dumped the coconuts someplace. They were hauled away by trucks and the land crabs were jillions of them and at night we did get mosquito nets there too so we slept on a cot and had a mosquito net inside of a tent. So we were pretty well protected but you'd often times wake up when a land crab crawled inside your mosquito net and you'd put your shoes on in the morning and there might be a land crab in there. It was not a pleasant place however they did build us an outdoor movie house which was a bunch of coconut logs on a little bit of incline and every night there would be a movie probably about every third day they'd change the movie so if you wanted to go to the movie why you went and sat there and watched the same movie the second and third night but it was something to do and eventually we put up a little, cleared off

Don Sehmel

Tape 1 of 2

a little place and put up a basketball hoop and had a basketball place to play. Other than that it was really training while we were there.

Question: Do you remember any of the movies?

Answer: No, no.

Question: Just something to pass the time.

Answer: I can remember I was smoking cigars at the time and me and my closest buddy, this Walt Carroll would go out there and sit on a coconut log and smoke a cigar and drink jungle juice. We all made jungle juice which was, we'd ferment it in five gallon water cans. Anything that would ferment we'd put in there, dehydrated potatoes, raisins, and anything, and let it bubble for 3-4 days and then drink it and it was pretty rotten but pleasurable, get a little high.

Question: Get a little buzz out of it?

Answer: Yeah, and then

Question: How did they supply you out there? I mean when you moved in did you set up a little city and food?

Answer: No, I'm sure there was a main quartermaster there and maybe our battalions would have trucks go to the quartermaster and draw rations and stuff but.

Question: Were you in a mess hall at that point or were you still eating K-rations or?

Answer: The first month or so we had C-rations and then they made a, they put coconut logs in the ground and headers across them, and canvas over the top and that was our mess hall. And then we were there, May, June, July and August, then we went to Guadalcanal because Pavuvu wasn't big enough to have combat training where you actually have live firing and such so we went to Guadalcanal. Didn't contribute to the island command work parties because it was getting close to another operation by then and did a couple of weeks of training there and then we made a training landing on Cape Esperance. And then we shoved off for what was going to be a quick operation and that was we were to take an island called Peleliu Which was in the western Caroline's, about 450 miles east of the central Philippines. And the reason for taking Peleliu was to secure the flank for Mac Arthur to go into Leyte. And Peleliu was a trauma. It was a bad one. They pounded the island, the navy did and we thought it was going to be a picnic because it was only about the size of Fox Island here. Are you familiar with Fox Island? Small island and the navy had been plastering it for weeks or the air force. I forget what the number was from New Guinea was up there with the liberators and seventeen's had been bombing it and we thought boy this is going to be a picnic and before we got to shore we were getting artillery fire and it was very effective and knocked out about sixty landing craft and it was bad.

Question: How did you come ashore?

Answer: Amphibious tractor.

Question: Is that in on wheels and drop the front?

Don Sehmel

Tape 1 of 2

Answer: At that time they didn't have those yet, you jumped over the side. And it was about a 6, 7, or 8 feet jump from the inside because they were that big and actually thinking about it now, we left our ships in Higgins boats Which did have the front that dropped down but we only went to the reef in the Higgins boat and then transferred from the Higgins boat to the amphibious tractor because there was a reef around Peleliu?? And the Higgins boats couldn't get in there so we transferred to the tractors and they took us. The reef was probably 300 yards from the actual beach and

Question: That was part of the problem wasn't it, the fact that you had to transfer at the reef?

Answer: Well, most of the casualties came when we had transferred from the Higgins boats to the amphibious tractors and were coming in, in that area between where the reef was and the actual beach. And it was touch and go before the situation got well in hand.

Question: You were basically sitting ducks.

Answer: Sitting ducks. A lot of guys were killed before they ever touched land.

Question: How do you deal with that. I mean I've never had to face that in my life. I mean I've seen one dead person, my mom passed away and that is it. Again does your mind check out on you? Here you are in this little tin can coming in.

Answer: Your mind is, oh my God, what is going on? And when you got to shore to try to get out of the amphibious tractor and get far enough up on the beach where you can hit the deck and protect yourself a bit. Of course there were a lot of shell holes there by then and fortunately we did get in a shell hole that did give us some protection for 10, 15, 20 minutes and then the artillery barrage and mortars diminished a bit and we went further in.

Question: Soft sand?

Answer: White coral sand. The thing I remember is a tank had gotten ashore just before I hit the beach and hit a mine and everyone in it was just roasted. The Japs had buried aerial bombs. The ones I saw were 500 pounders which buried in the sand with the front part of the bomb just about at surface level and instead of having a bomb fuse had a pressure fuse in it and this tank had hit one of those and that was it for them and our commanding general had said several days before we got there that this would be a nasty one but a quick one. That it would be over in two or three days and it wasn't and it went on for two and a half months, and our division was shot up so bad. They had.. there was another island about six miles from Peleliu called Angaur which the army 81st division was going to take and they did. And it was a minor combat island so the 81st division was actually the floating reserve for the 1st marine division. And anyhow a regiment of the 81st division came in finally. Our division commander didn't want to have any army help because of the conflict between army and marine and inter-service rivalry. And finally the 3rd amphibious commander which was a 3 star general named Geiger told our division commander you bring in help and they brought in the 81st division by that time the 1st marine division regiments had about 55% casualty and we were just about done in and the army did very well there. It was a good army outfit. I've been involved with some army outfits that I didn't think much of but, the 81st was a good outfit and they did well. That ended. We left there in November. The actual ending date was September 15th. We left there in November and I remember the ship we boarded to take us back to Pavuvu was, (Schlotodike?) was the name of it. It was a Dutch ship with wood decks and it was absolutely loaded with these insects that crawl all over, cockroaches. It was absolutely loaded with cockroaches all over and the bread was full of weevils. And so, I can

Don Sehmel

Tape 1 of 2

remember we were glad to get bread because we didn't normally get it, hold it up and pull out the dark spots which were weevils, and it was a hell of a ride but it got us back to Pavuvu.

Question: Hold that thought for a second. OK.