

Oliver, Philip Interview 2-27-86

[Speaker 3]

This is an interview with Mr. Philip Oliver, Route 2, Box 456B, White Pine, Tennessee. Interview conducted on February 27th, 1986, by Dr. Charles Johnson of the Department of History, University of Tennessee, Knoxville. University of Tennessee.

[Speaker 2]

It's all set up.

[Speaker 3]

You can just start right there, I can fill in anything.

[Speaker 1]

When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, I marked two weeks graduating from school, finishing this course. What sort of training was it? It was Aviation and Scenic Major School in Chicago, Illinois.

It was a civilian school on 87th and 10th. It was a Chicago Technical Training School. The Navy had at least, they had about 32 instructors, civilian instructors, and they were running a course for Navy and Marine Aviation and Scenic Majors.

In other words, ground crew, mechanics more than anything else, because back then we were taught seamanship, ordinance, ground handling of aircraft, navigation, some basic navigation, weather. It was a general school, along with machine shot practices, shot math, machine shot theory, wired cadence, hydraulics. It was a good, a real good course, a real good program.

We were going to school five days a week. We had no liberty at all. We were transported back and forth from the Naval Armory down to the foot of Randolph Street, out in the mouth of the Chicago River there in the May.

[Speaker 3]

Was your brother with you?

[Speaker 1]

No, he was back in Quantico at the time, but I had gone up there to school. And there was 90 of us from Quantico that went up there in July and started in school. When they put us through school, we were going from 8 o'clock in the morning until 5 o'clock in the afternoon, five days a week.

And when we would get on the bus, they had city buses chartered to take us back down Lake Shore Drive and back to the Army. We would go in the Army. There was just one big building with a compound out in front of it, out on a pier, and it was fenced off in front, and there were three side by side by water.

We all slept on a big gym floor, three blocks high. There was about 600 Navy and Marine Corps personnel there. And we studied until 9 o'clock, and then 9 o'clock, lights out.

6 o'clock in the morning, we were up and showered and ate breakfast and were on our way to school at 7. Got there at 8. And this was a routine, and it was actually more stringent and tougher than boot camp was, actually, in the three single months before that.

But they really were putting us through. Anyway, we graduated the 19th of December, left that same day by a troop train, 90 of us, going back to Quantico, Virginia. And we traveled across Midwest and down through Pennsylvania and West Virginia, down through the hypersphere, and then to Quantico.

We got in Quantico about 3 o'clock in the morning. And they put the train off on the siding. There were six cars, two baggage cars, and a nine or six pulling stations.

And we were all asleep, and we just slept until morning. When we got up in the morning, the sergeant in charge took our papers to the provost marshal or someplace and turned them in, and they told us that our unit had been shipped out to California. So we stayed on the train, and they cut a letter for us to continue on to the West Coast.

We left sometime that evening, and we went down through Norfolk and down along the East Coast on seaboard lines and crossing the Pensacola and the New Orleans. And we stopped in New Orleans overnight. They gave us four-hour living in New Orleans.

And then we went on across Texas, down to the town of Brownwood. We ate breakfast one morning in Brownwood, a little cow town down about 85 miles southwest of Dallas. And it just had dirt streets and board sidewalks and a white-flabbered building.

But it seemed to track right down the middle of the main street, and it's 100 yards wide, I suppose, and there's a street on both sides. And it's just a little two-block long town. We had a little today, but we ate in this boarding house there at breakfast and got back aboard the train.

Went on to Lubbock that afternoon. Went to Flagstaff, and they took us off. That was Christmas Day in 1941.

They took us off, fed us in Fred Hardy's house and restaurant in Flagstaff. Back in those days, Fred Hardy was big in Santa Fe. And that's what they gave us.

I remember they fed us a Tennessee dinner, and there was about 14 inches of snow on the ground in Flagstaff, and there was pine trees and a whole few places in and out. And then we went on into California the next day, daylight the next morning. We were into the valley, and we got into Los Angeles about noon, and we went on down to San Diego that evening.

And I spent the night in North Island, and the next day we were transferred out to some Kearney Mesa, which is now part of San Diego, but at that time it was out in the boondocks 15 miles north of San Diego. There was an auxiliary airfield up there that had no buildings at all, just grass, maintained a side runway. And whenever Lindbergh Field would be a fog den down in San Diego, they'd divert flights up there in emergency.

And that was the area where, I don't know if you remember the Akron, the dirigible accident of 1938-39, when several sailors were holding onto the ropes, and the gust of wind caused

raising. Well, that was at Kearney Field when that happened. But anyway, we established a camp there.

And, of course, we were assigned the Fleet Post Office, and we were members of the Fleet Marine Force Pacific. And we carried Fleet Marine Force address from that December 19th until December 1944 when I came back to the States. I was on the West Coast.

It's hard to believe. We didn't have any equipment. We had eight officers.

We had probably 125, 150 missionaries in this group. And eight officers. We had two DC-5s.

They were R-3Bs. High-winged Douglass. They only made five of them.

And there were four out of the DC-3. And we carried 18 passengers. And they looked more like an A-20 or something like that than they did a transport.

Well, we had two of those. And a couple of ducks was running the J-02s, the amphibians. And we had a Lockheed 10.

And we had a Beechcraft, J-RB, and a couple of SMJs, which was a two-seat training plane. And this was our total planes in this BMJ squadron. We had a squadron of F-4Fs.

We were in Group 11 at the time. And we had a squadron of SBDs. And we had a squadron of SB2Us.

And we had another two fighter squadrons and two bomber squadrons and a utility squadron and a BMO squadron, but it was detached in North Island. And we established a camp around that area. And they started paving the field and started building.

But I stayed at Kearney. We trained. We had men coming in daily almost.

And we would assimilate them into the unit. And March 1st, each squadron formed a group. And we became, from the 125 men, we formed a group of Headquarters Squadron, Service Squadron, and two Utility Squadrons.

We got our first DC-3s about the middle of March. We began to get a few reserve officers in who were qualified to fly them. And one man in particular was a lieutenant colonel, or he was a captain at the time, by the name of Harry Van Lue, who was a senior pilot at Eastern Airlines.

He was a reserve officer in the Marine Corps. He was qualified on the DC-3s. So he became in as training officer.

And we started, we became a training squadron. We opened a navigation school. Our commanding officer had been trained by this Navy Commander Weems, who ran the navigation school in Annapolis.

He had trained six officers from the Marine Corps that followed in 1940, 1941, on aerial navigation. So our commanding officer was Warren Sweetser, and he was one of those six

officers that had come through that school. So he, as commanding officer, he established a navigation school for those to start training navigators.

We were checking out pilots. Our pilots had been trained in Pensacola, but they had never been checked out in training at all. We had to train all of our check crews, all of our flight crews.

We had to pick out men who had enough training. It was a hectic time. We were involved in our own security as well.

We had men in machine gun pits, machine gun watch out, and aircraft machine guns. I was out there when they had the day-long alert when the submarine was shelled on me. I was there when they picked up the Japanese and transported them inland.

I stayed on the West Coast until March of 1943. We trained two squadrons and sent them out in September, October of 1942, and they came to the South Pacific. Then we continued to check out crews until we got orders to move ahead to the South Pacific in March of 1943.

We went aboard a ship in San Diego and flew 16 planes over. The ground crew and ground personnel went aboard the ship, and we went out on a Dutch merchant vessel.

[Speaker 2]

Before you leave the West Coast, you mentioned the Japanese being picked up and removed. Did you, as a Marine around that base, feel any kind of threat, or were you concerned about them?

[Speaker 1]

No. Really, they were there in the valley. They were in the general population.

They were no threat, except that there was so much turmoil. The Japanese had made a couple of appearances by sun-off the coast. We had spent several days on alert and nights on watch and really expecting an attack of some kind.

The point was, and the main reason that they were interred inland was for their own safety, because the civilian population was a threat to their safety, even the service personnel. You know, at the start of World War II, in October and November of 1941, we were having discussions with Japan on trying to establish a better treaty, a better relationship with them. We had had problems.

In 1938, they sank the Panay in the Yangtze River and then just said, so sorry. And we let those things slide, and we let them slide. There was an incident in the international section of PQ along in 1940, when the British and the American Marines and different international contingents there, armed forces that were on embassy guard, had to stand off the Japanese at their gates one time on the inner city.

And they were just crowding in, and we never made a strong protest about these things back then. I came home on Thanksgiving Day, and I had sent you two archives in 1941. I came home, and I was talking to an old high school.

I was talking to a football coach over there, Petey Siler. And Petey had been a veteran of World War I, and he was in France in the Ambulance Corps. And he and I were talking, and one afternoon we walked downtown together.

And Petey was there. Anyway, Coach Siler and I walked downtown along in the afternoon, and we were talking. And I said to him, I said, you know, I was an 18-year-old brash young Marine private.

I said, if the Japanese started, then, Coach, I said, we'd knock their socks off in six weeks' time. And he said to me, don't you ever sell those Japanese short. He said, if they get into a war with us, and he said, it looks like it might be, he said, they're going to give you a fight.

And he said, you're going to find you have a fight on your hands. Well, I carried that with me for four years. I remember those words.

I talked to him many times after that. I thought a great deal, Coach Siler. And he was right.

He was right. That was the attitude we had in the Marine Corps. But we didn't have any equipment.

And I started to tell you, we had to mount the propaganda campaign. First of all, okay, I'm going to let you lay up here for a little while. I've been away, and he's trying to make up, and he is a good asker.

But anyway, during that six- to eight-month period from December the 7th, until along about the middle of 1942, the newspapers were carrying a lot of propaganda type, and posters, and you'd see them in railway stations, bus stations. They were sold on the radio, you know. There were no television then.

But they were building up a hatred for the Japanese, getting the people involved in war plans, getting them to take jobs in those plans, getting people to volunteer for services, and to form U.S. soldiers and treat servicemen better, you know, and things. And it was a really hectic time. I don't think America and people, this particular civilian population, ever realized how little military equipment we had and how vulnerable we were that first six to eight months from December the 7th until along about, really the first offensive was in August of 1942.

And even then we didn't have enough equipment to do that job. But things began to come together, and this was where, with this propaganda, this hate propaganda, which they had to use at that time, and there was reason for it, began to have sort of a backfire effect on the Japanese population on the West Coast. And I believe it was March of 1942, February, March, that President Roosevelt signed the order evacuating the Japanese internment and taking them inland to Utah and Idaho and places.

But it was more, there was no real problem out there. It was more for their own safety. However, it was traumatic experience for them because they were not looked on as really first-class citizens out there at that time, and yet they were good citizens.

We know now and we learn later. But it took families who had come there and worked and scrimped and saved for years to get a little bit of the money to open a garage or gas station

or a little fruit stand or something. They were thrifty, self-supporting people, and they were uprooted and just forced to sell their homes because they couldn't get out of them or leave them.

Their business was the same way, and they couldn't, you know, on the discretionary, you couldn't get your money out of the business. And this was going on over a period of two or three months until they got them moved inland to these camps. Later on, I think they realized the mistake, but it was really not a mistake at that time as far as what had to be done.

We had to do a lot of things we didn't want to do. In 1942, there were a lot of decisions made that would not normally have been made and you wouldn't think about them today, but they had to be done. They had to commit men when they didn't have proper equipment.

They didn't know they didn't have the equipment.

[Speaker 2]

Now, when you left from San Diego on board, did you have a feeling you were pretty well equipped and pretty well ready?

[Speaker 1]

Well, we did at that time because we'd had a year. We sent two units out and they were pretty well equipped, and then we were receiving equipment that we'd never dreamed of having a year before. When we went over, we took some of what they called Dallas huts that were 16-foot square, plywood-sided prefabricated units that could be set up in units of three or units of one and set up on a 16-by-16-foot platform and made into a livable unit with windows with screens on them and everything, and you could house, in a triple unit, you could house ten men in it, you know.

And we had these with us so that we were getting away from tents. I lived in a tent from December of 1941 until December the 19th, 1944. I lived in a tent.

I never lived in a building at all. I lived in a tent or a foxhole or something. I never was in a permanent building.

But these Dallas huts were the closest thing to a permanent building we had. But when we got over there, we had those and we had much better equipment than we had started out with, tools, A-frames, overhaul equipment in the overhaul shop and things. But they took away the overhaul process from us and turned it over to service squadron and took some of our personnel and put them in service squadron.

They had an A&E shop and they had a special section for instruments and for engine overhaul and engine changes and everything and set up a unit on the operations line which made it much better because when you have three or four squadrons using specialized facilities, you can get more efficiency out of it than you could if you had one squadron doing everything for itself, taking care of a chunk of it and then another squadron doing the same thing because you have too much duplication. And you can schedule your personnel for

around-the-clock work so that you have maintenance going on 24 hours a day, rebuilding going on 24 hours a day, and it makes a much better operation.

We were in New Caledonia at Concuda on that particular operation and our job was to fly supplies in up through the islands and haul personnel and supplies, mail money or payroll checks, move the personnel back. I carried many wounded men on board the plane. And we were just an air transport squadron for the South Pacific because South Pacific Combat Air Transport was scant for sure.

And I stayed with them. I was a crew chief. I made master sergeant.

I went up one squadron at a time and I was a sergeant when I went overseas. I made private first class in January 1942 and it was a permanent promotion signed by President Roosevelt because it was the last permanent promotion given out from Marine Corps and there was no attempt at it. But then I made master sergeant two weeks before I was 21 years old.

February 1, 1944 I became master sergeant. Up until that time I was a technical sergeant flying as crew chief all through the islands up there. And there's my flight log book of most of the time that I was just overseas.

We'd fly to Sydney, Australia and back the next day. And the next day I'd take three or four days off. My first night would take the plane on the next flight.

He'd come back and I'd take the next flight out. Did you fly in the Guadalcanal? Oh yes, we flew in the Guadalcanal, Bougainville, Munda, Espritos, Sinos, La Plata and the Hebrides Islands and Norfolk Island which I doubt if you've ever heard of Norfolk Island.

It's a little island all by itself halfway between New Caledonia and New Zealand. 400 miles from the nearest land. It's a little island about a mile wide and about 8 or 9 miles long.

Most beautiful place I've ever seen in my life. Part of the mutineers from the bounty, the descendants were settled on that island back in the late 1800s. And they lived in English cottages, stucco cottages with rose gardens to have horse and buggies and most pastoral scenes you've ever seen in your life.

Beautiful place, beautiful place. I've been in there two or three different times. There was a New Zealand contingent on, an Air Force contingent on the island and we would drop by and drop their mail off and we'd come from Auckland and we'd drop their mail off to them.

I was in 16 different islands over there and a contingent on, including Sydney, Australia and Brisbane, Australia and Auckland, New Zealand and Norfolk and of course New Caledonia and Esparito Santos and Ifadi in the New Hebrides Island and then the next island up where there was an airfield was Henderson Field Royal Canal and then above Royal Canal the Russell Islands had an air fighter strip. I stayed there for, later on I transferred up there and stayed there but as they would take the islands we would follow right in. I was, I've got a picture there of a crew taken in Munda on, I believe it was September the 7th, 1943 and the airfield was not open until September the 9th but we went in and picked up 14 wounded New Zealand and flew them out of there back to Royal Canal and then back to Kauntula.

One of them had a very bad concussion and they were rushing him back to New Zealand for brain surgery and he was in a very bad case. I just, in Fort Worth this past September Depp and Alliston who was the pilot on that flight and I were talking, I hadn't seen him since World War II and we were discussing and I was telling him about that flight and we were looking at that picture he said, well I really didn't know what we had aboard because he said, I was always in the cockpit and I did the flying and I let you fellas take care of all that and he did because, now some pilots took more than others but we had these big wounded men on board and with the corpsman and I and of course I set up stretchers in the guarding cell for them and we carried them in and loaded them on the plane and a whole 14 of them back out there on that day.

We've had celebrities on, all celebrities around over there and met people, I was with Artie Shaw for a little while over there in Hawthorne, New Zealand I was with Bob Hope, I put Bob Hope on a small pipe of cub and strapped him in it and he flew over to another little island 20 miles away to put on a show, a performance he and Jerry Colon and Patty Thomas and I think Francis Langford was with him at the time and there was two women and three men

[Speaker 2]

Tony O'Rourke was with that crew

[Speaker 1]

and they were flown over to Pavuvu and put on their show in the afternoon for the 1st Marine Division The 1st Marine Division was not on the main island they had picked an isolated island for their training island and there was a reason for it and I'll explain a little more later but anyway during that year's time I traveled all over the Pacific and I got to see the 11th I was in, just like in Boulderville I went in there when they were still fighting on the front of the defense front and we'd get in and get out back earlier we used to go into Guadalcanal we'd take off and fly over to the New Hebrides Island on Esprit of Santos there's a big bomber strip up there at Barfield and we would land there and stay until about 2 o'clock in the morning we'd go out to the field at midnight and I'd pre-flight the plane and we'd get everything ready they'd be fueled up and all and we'd take off at 2 o'clock in the morning and fly into Guadalcanal so that we could arrive just at 6 o'clock in the morning in the daylight usually the Japanese air activity was over by that time about 2 or 3 months and then we got to where it was safe enough for us to stay over so we'd fly to Guadalcanal in the daytime stay overnight and then take off the next morning to fly back and then all up through the islands it was the same way as they would take Munda we would go in as soon as the airfield was open enough we could get in and land and we'd land whatever supplies were needed we'd drop parapacks to the troops up there in the New Georges for one week when it was flooded by air and they opened us I had a trip down to Saguetorn lower end of the New Georges about 60 miles south it would be southeastern Munda and we'd go into there but these little fire strips they were you've got to remember we were flying DC-3 R-5s and C-3s R-40s twin engine planes and we were going in on little strips 2,600, 2,800 feet coral strips and we'd have to clear coconut trees on the end of the runway and get in and all you could do was get stopped and then we'd have to taxi back the cars would cut into the trees and rev the engine up to get out of there and then maybe the next place we'd stop we'd have 5,000 foot runways but it was touch and go little strips of bella la bella on and on and the twin strips and on and on and when you took off on this one runway there was about a 40 or 50 foot cliff that just about pumped the edge of the water it was just like

taking off a carrier if you were airborne by the time you got to the end of that runway you were either going to fly or you were going to set out in the water and it was a very short runway but at Bougainville we had a good long strip the one strip, the bottom strip the seabees got in there and they put a marsh in that and made a good strip out of that and then a little island, a green island which was halfway between Bougainville and Revolve that we took now, Green Island was the last island that we were involved in before I transferred out and left the organization and at Green Island there was a Navy lookout commander by the name of Richard Nixon who was assistant operations officer at Guadalcanal under Harry Van Loo and he kept wanting operations of his own so they gave him Green Island and I went in there one morning Lieutenant Buckley and Lieutenant Hughes and myself and there were three Navy TVFs that ran together and crashed on the runway and we had to circle in the P-suit until they could get those wreckage pushed off the runway we finally got in there and this tent with the front porch on it was the operations hut everything was makeshift and in the mud Lieutenant Richard Nixon was the operations officer there I've got pictures of him when he was in the Navy over there later on I went to Washington I had lunch with him met with him for about three hours one time but he was one of the people who became famous after World War II about that time this was in April of 1944 I was transferred to the 1st Marine Division as crew chief for the commanding general on his private airplane in the twin engine Beechcraft CRB and Lieutenant Robert Beecher and Lieutenant Mitchell and myself and a staff sergeant from the Stanley Sentries went up to the 1st Marine Division and took over this Beechcraft we had six Piper Cubs the JR2Bs and we had one CB and one ex-Marine aviator and four or five civilian aviators Piper civilians Piper pilots who volunteered to fly these Cubs the division was twenty miles away on a little island there was just a roadway along the beach big enough to land on so we used the Cubs to transport personnel from the division over to the Piper Strip at Makita Bay in Pabu or Benici rather in the rest of the island and I kept the Beechcraft over there on the Piper Strip that's where the backseat squadron the major squadron originally had started out up there now they had moved on up at that time to London and Bougainville but we used these Piper Cubs for transportation and from April of 1944 until December of 1944 my main job was to provide the aerial transportation and ground transportation to the two-star general Major William H. Richards and his assistant division commander a one-star general by the name of Alworth Smith and during that time when we would have admirals and marine generals coming and going we would fly them back and forth and I had to always put their rank on whatever if I had a two-star general aboard I put two stars on if I had a four-star admiral I put the four-star admiral during that time we decided we didn't need the co-pilot Lt.

Mitchell was not satisfied he asked for a transfer back the SCAF to go back to South Beach so he was transferred out and Lt. Beecher was General Perks' aide and his pilot and then I flew as co-pilot and I got to fly in these Cubs a little bit and when we were ready in September in August we went aboard ship I took two Beech Piper Cubs and four men one in this department by the name of Woodrow Witherspoon and Sergeant Sanchez and a Corporal Low Low's mother or something like that I can't remember his last name and myself and we took the two Piper Cubs and we took the wings off and put them in wooden crates and took the Cubs aboard an LST and up the elevator and on to the top deck tied them down set the wing crates up around them to protect them and they loaded aboard all the other equipment these manning craft and alligators these amphibious banks and parts of the 5th Regiment parts of the 3rd Pioneer Battalion this amphibious tractor company and we spent

about two weeks loading all these LSTs and getting everything ready and all the transports that they used and the communication ships and all formed a task force and we started we went down to Guadalcanal and we made a couple practice landings on the beach at Guadalcanal where the original landings were made practice landings on Guadalcanal and we went back aboard a ship and we formed up into a convoy and we steamed up through the slot up by the Admiralty Islands and went north into the Central Pacific and on September the 15th we invaded Peleliu before we arrived now I'm going to ask you a question I don't know if you spent much time digging up into the history of World War II or not but have you ever really given much thought as to the operations in the Pacific as rated as to the difficulty of one island against another where would you rank Peleliu in that category?

[Speaker 2]

It's got to be someplace very close to the top of the heap for most difficult and most glorified It is but

[Speaker 1]

it's a little known fact in history there was the June the 5th landings in Normandy and Paris was being liberated at that time and there was so much going on in Europe and it never got much of a press play however the history books tell you that it was the second most costly operation in the Pacific up to that time we lost out of 18,000 men we had 9,000 casualties 50% we had 1,300 men killed and the rest of them were casualties it to me was a my first real beachhead and it was an awesome thing to go through I spent five weeks on that island sleeping in foxholes and I went five weeks without having a hot meal sleeping in the rain just lay down on the ground at night or a bunker where you could get in before you woke up and I had work to do and we did it we experienced typhoon even while we were there but it would be hot it would be hot in the daytime but I've seen a wind come across a typhoon and drop down 45-50 degrees and you just about freeze for a little while I've got a picture I'll show you how I dressed it's on that and when the weather changed you'd feel it darn fast it's somewhere about here well yeah now there's another one that goes in here maybe they're in there somewhere well this you can see no shirts and short cut off and like this when that rain would come in and it would turn gray and misty just like a fog sweep over that isle you couldn't get warm and we didn't have extra clothing I had a change of clothing and that was all I can't figure where my pictures are because I had them here's my original orders transferred me from the Marine Division that's an interesting shot this is a TBF we had I crewed one of those for a little while but this beach craft that we have here I got these out just to establish a little credibility this is the beach craft that was the General's private plane he had a 12 year old daughter her nickname was Sleepy and the plane was named for her and this was our crew this was Robert Beecher, Robert Mitchell this was Corporal Mathis this was Sentry myself these two men were sent back Beecher and Sentry remained with the plane and I flew the I was with the General every day I talked to him just like I talk to you this was the original Naval Armory of Chicago and this was overseas at Tontoota this was taken in the Russell Islands and I had a war correspondent by the name of George McMillan and a combat photographer by the name of Fitzgerald who was a photographer in the Milwaukee Journal and they came over one day and asked me if I would take a jeep and take them down to the this naval pier down there and this was a New Zealand woman and they had just opened the Red Cross and so I took them down and they asked me if I would stand there and pose like I was in horseshoes this was the DC-3 that we used in the Isles and I was in I've

got these pictures but I took them out last year to take to Fort Worth with me and never put them back there's a Marine Museum at Quantico, Virginia it opened in 1979 and I went up there I was up in Massachusetts and I came back down through there and I stopped walked up to the gate of the museum, there was a corporal on guard there and I talked to him and I just happened to look right straight in front of me and here sat the Beechcraft now this is not the original but it was a facsimile of the 1st Marine Division Beechcraft I said to the young corporal, I said I was crew chief on that World War II and I've got some good pictures better pictures around somewhere but I don't know where they are I had a lot of pictures Fitzgerald would would make pictures and blow them up any time I asked him for anything and we made, I've got a lot of these are pictures of aerial photographs of the island of Peleliu during the fighting and I I'll have to look back there

[Speaker 2]

yeah that's when I came

[Speaker 1]

back to the states I came back to the states I went to Buffalo, New York went through the Army Air Force Training Command School up there on the R5Cs went back to California and was crewing those I was engineering chief of a squadron of those when the war ended and I had my enlistment had ended so I just asked to be discharged and I got out of service September the 27th 1945 you come right back

[Speaker 2]

here then?

[Speaker 1]

I came back home here's my original discharge and I came home on October the 5th and I got home midnight on Wednesday night on Thursday morning I went downtown stopped in Freer's Drugstore to have a cup of coffee at the soda fountain because it was a gathering place in the hometown and the manager of J.C. Penney Company came across the street and was having a cup of coffee shook my hand and said when did you get home and I said last night about midnight he said how about coming to work for me and I said well I'll consider it Pete I said what he said no I need somebody now he said I really, I'm serious he said I've got a job for you and I said well give me a day or two to think about it anyway on Saturday morning right along midnight Wednesday night on Saturday morning I went to work I never drew any G.I. benefits of any kind I never was on this 5220 rocking chair pay I went right to work and I worked for them for six or eight weeks and I went back to my old original job and I worked at that for about two months and I went to work in Knoxville for a firm went on the road for them got married I went down to Georgia Tech and applied for admission they turned me down and after six months later they wrote me a letter and told me that they had instituted a make up program where I would be eligible to go in there my freshman year and make up I needed credit in foreign language and at that time my wife was in the hospital sick and I was married and went over to the Grand Stones I never took advantage of it I won three battle stars in the Pacific

[Speaker 2]

New Zealand New Jersey and Philadelphia

[Speaker 1]

I was awarded air crewman's wings for combat flying I went on hand grenade missions in a Piper Cub and got shot down on a little island

[Speaker 2]

Where was that? Was that on near Peleliu?

[Speaker 1]

Yes, the island of Negev I don't know that island I guess Well It is really just a part of that It's the next island up It's only about a hundred yard causeway between separating the hundred yard channel But there was a small fighter strip There was this ridge I'm going to get those pictures I'll show you There was this ridge that the Japanese they were holed up in this ridge they had it fortified with caves and they combed all through it They didn't get them all out of there until 1947 I think after two years or three years but they were holed up in there and then we were being shelled when we tried to our regiment our combat team would try to take a hill or work out a certain section of a road to protect the road because there was a road going around the island and the Japanese would shoot and get them down on the road so they would try to take the combat teams and clear that section out and they would come in for shelling from over on the other island and on the 27th, 28th of September when the 5th Marine Regiment landed on that little island of Gatsby and secured it a 24-hour operation I think it was secured on the 29th but that morning Lieutenant Beecher had taken General Rupert up to watch the 5th Regiment go across this channel they went across they had some Sherman tanks because they thought they could stay in shallow water and get them across and they also had some of these amphibious tractors these alligators and they took the regiment across onto the beach on the other side of that channel now during that time they were fighting right off the road in these hills we had combat teams fighting the Japanese here and you could see them you could see our Marines behind trees shooting into the caves up there and the Japanese shooting back they didn't bother us so much, you know, the Cubs we'd fly along 500 feet or so and stay out of the way and watch and the General and Lieutenant Beecher was in one plane and Witherspoon and General Moore the two-star general of the 1st Marine Air Wing was in another plane and they were watching this amphibious operation from the air and they spotted a Japanese artillery piece there was a couple of pillboxes and a long slit trench between right on the edge of the airfield over on the island and it was a long slit trench and was fortified and there was a Japanese 77mm artillery piece in a bunker in there, they spotted so they came back and the General was all excited about it and Lieutenant Beecher said get some hand grenades and let's go back so he and I went up I put eight hand grenades in the I jumped in the back seat put these hand grenades down on the floor and they were in those round canisters just fragmentation grenades and we line up on the run on this slit trench and we practiced this 300 feet a hand grenade would explode just about on impact it takes, the fuse normally is three seconds and at 300 feet it would just about hit it falls about 120 feet a second or so, but it just hit it and just on impact it would explode so we got lined up at 300 feet of slow flight we'd come down I'd pull a pin release the grenades we'd go on, turn around, come back we made seven passes and I kept hearing rifle fire and I said to him automatic fire and I said we're getting shot at, we better get out of there just about that time he said I'm hit and he was hitting a leg and went into a dive and I reached and got a hold of him and pulled his back and we got the plane straightened out and I got it back down to the field and landed and got him in the first stage I taxied that airplane back over to the area and I got out and looked and there

were six bullet holes right down along the side right by the knocked the back window out right in the back seat, one up through the wing and one up through the windshield and we were being shot at I'm not joking that

[Speaker 2]

comes a little plane, we've got a picture of it here

[Speaker 1]

those bullets went into that airplane right by me and I wanted to read something here I think it's here somewhere I didn't realize this thing deteriorated so much but there's a newspaper I couldn't see it's a clipping it came in the journal that's one of those planes that you were in this is an old Y1 the cubs are smaller yet I'll show you the cubs that we were kind of the forerunners this was one of them here and I flown in that one

[Speaker 2]

looks a little fragile

[Speaker 1]

but let me see if I can find it there I came back in Peleliu in October and I was over

[Speaker 2]

at the division so let's take some time and get some oxygen I'll use my ventilator

[Speaker 1]

our our rear base from Peleliu on the 20th of October I went aboard ship and moved out of there and I arrived back around the 1st of November sometime the day that we left Peleliu they were landing in the Philippines I believe it was on the 20th of October because we heard it that night on board ship and when we came back we were kind of broken up units you know were pretty well cut up I was on board a merchant marine ship and there was about 140 of us on it we had the remnants of this war dog platoon there was about 25 or 30 of these Doberman Pinschers they had them tied all over the rear deck in this dog platoon and you know that was the worst cruise I ever had in my life I'm telling you those dogs were I saw them bite one man in the calf of the leg and he couldn't walk and I never seen such a terrible looking bruise in my life but every night they'd say a dog's loose on the deck you know and everybody'd have to go below deck to protect themselves till they could catch it you know but it's

[Speaker 2]

almost a fierce dog

[Speaker 1]

well they some of them were those dogs are individuals like humans are and they're trained for certain things now some of the dogs were attack dogs some of them were messengers and some of them were dogs who just signaled alerts but you didn't know what dog was what and there was one handler for each dog and very seldom another handler and the thing was that they were had been through this combat you know and like the men they were on edge too and they were just dangerous to be around and people get careless you can't believe how careless people can be in total disregard for safety after going through a traumatic experience of that nature five or six weeks of combat they don't look at anything

and they're not afraid of anything more or less they just sort of ignore things you go through a change from the time that we landed we walked a mile and got back aboard ship and we knew then that it was strictly business and we were going to face the enemy there was I suppose 300 350 of us on board this LSD for that 20 or 21 days from the time that we landed there until we landed at Pelham and during that two to three week period they gradually became friendly with each other they attended church services and particularly the day or two days before the landing everybody was trying to help each other get their gear straightened out pack ammunition pack gear rations everybody was kind of looking after each other and the overall feeling was unspoken but it was the fact that we've got to face this