

Barker, Lawrence S. "Tom" Interview 2-6-91

[Speaker 2]

4, 3, 2, 1, testing, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, over. This is Stan Tinsley speaking. I'm talking today to Mr. Lawrence S. Parker of 5312 Buckhead Trail in Knoxville. This is the 6th day of February, 1991. Mr. Parker, when did you join the service?

[Speaker 1]

I originally signed up in January of 1942. I was on active duty in September of 1942.

[Speaker 2]

Okay, you were in the Marine Corps, right? Right. How old were you when you joined the Marines?

[Speaker 1]

Twenty-two.

[Speaker 2]

Anybody else in your family in the service at that time? No, no. Okay.

Were there places where you trained and where you went from, you know, one to the other and so forth?

[Speaker 1]

The first post was the OCS at Quantico, Virginia. And then I heard it was, I should say, the OCS at Quantico, Virginia. After three months, we were commissioned probationary second lieutenants.

And it was the reserve officer's course at also Quantico. At that time, I was transferred to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, where I was sent to the engineer school, to be in an instructor engineer school in Mapping. I was then sent to New York for the Pacific Navy School in Manfall Recognition, back to Camp Lejeune, and then overseas, joined the Second Marine Division in New Zealand.

That was also in 1942.

[Speaker 2]

Had you been to different parts of the country before you got in the service? Did you travel around some before you got in the service? Traveled some, yeah.

Describe some of the training that you had here in the States, and was it realistic and helpful?

[Speaker 1]

Well, we had, at Quantico, as future officers, we were given practically the same thing they got in boot camp at Parris Island and San Diego, except that we had, on top of that, a lot of classes. And it was realistic, it was helpful at that point in time. Going from the OCS to ROC, there became more classes, more field problems.

It was, again, realistic, except we were in the snow and ice in Virginia, and we were preparing for the South Pacific where it was thawing. You could break the ice and make the landings up there and whatnot. It was realistic, if they could make it, yes, I think.

Probably could have been improved on. We were not studying World War I tactics at all. We were doing more water tactics than that.

We had the advantage of having Guadalcanal being fought about the same time, and we could bring them back from the Pacific to what we were getting into.

[Speaker 2]

What did you think of the people that were in charge of your training?

[Speaker 1]

They were typical. They were a tough bunch. The NCOs were tough, a bunch of good instructor types.

The officers were, on whatever case, very intelligent men. We thought they were. They were people like ourselves who had gone to graduate school, in most cases.

A great few Naval Academy graduates. Because the Marine Corps is part of the Corps, it would be primarily of graduates of the graduating colleges, state universities, and so forth, VMI.

[Speaker 2]

How long before you left the United States? Approximately.

[Speaker 1]

Approximately. We're working back on the dates. It was in the fall of 1943, I don't know.

I think it was October. It was a rush trip because I was replacing somebody who had been killed, and they rushed me out pretty fast. It was only a very short time before we left for Drogheda.

[Speaker 2]

Okay. Tell me about your overseas search. Search?

[Speaker 1]

My job was mapping, relief mapping, and reproduction of maps. We were also all Marine officers, almost all Marines, but basically trained as infantrymen. And demolitions, that sort of thing.

We were sent into operation, quite often in the case of myself, and people got killed out there. We'd sit here and take over a demolition position, a Marine Corps, something like that. And we lost people, and we lost quite a few.

[Speaker 2]

Where did you leave from in the States?

[Speaker 1]

I left from San Francisco.

[Speaker 2]

Okay. And then tell me about your trip over in that...

[Speaker 1]

Well, I...

[Speaker 2]

The trip you were on that was grounded and so forth.

[Speaker 1]

Well, that was later on. Okay. That's right.

I was in the fast transport area for the best part. North Fork area, down to the zoo. That's right.

When we were heading that way, they wanted me out there fast. Let's say we had... The guy who'd been killed actually had been murdered, to be honest with you.

And he was trying to keep the police out. So anyway, my first operation was over in Toronto, where we lost a lot of people. And I went to Jordan and actually had a demolition platoon, but didn't do a little of no surveying.

I was sure I had to take the island, because there wasn't much to survey, as you can imagine, to map. The mapping there was taken by our photographs. The other islands around there, we were going to do some mapping, but they pulled us out of there and sent us to Hawaii.

About ten days. The place was stinking too bad. It was a mess.

And we went to Hawaii, and the big island of Hawaii, the Kamualala, which is on the Parker Ranch, and built a camp. An engineering group did build a camp. Got it pretty well fixed up.

And we went down to Saipan. And we landed in Saipan on the 15th of June. Forty-five.

Forty-four. Forty-four. Just after the D-Day landing.

And so we got shipwrecked on the way out there. And this particular thing, if you notice that map, I'll show you where it goes. We didn't do extensive mapping of that island.

The only maps we had out there were some old geographic maps that worked pretty good. And we had found, after we got ashore, some German maps. So the island belonged to the Germans at one time.

Pretty good maps. But meanwhile, we did an extensive and rapid survey of the island and made good maps. Real good maps.

I just tell them that's being used today out there. It doesn't necessarily have to be the island. It was one of the largest landmasses.

It was a much different one than now. We'd gone, at least. They wanted it for control.

It was going to be used. Fort Air Base. It was used to be 29 Fort Air Base.

And then we took Tinian right after that, which was the famous perfect landing. We were decoys down off of Tinian town. And you have to fly in like this.

Well, the fortification came in short. About the end of the island, there was some cliffs over there. We had boatloads of stuff to fish down.

They were short early post. They'd been short for almost a day. So we had to turn around, pick up after them.

Meanwhile, we fought them ashore. And we were on Tinian for a few weeks. I wasn't there too long.

We went back to Saipan, made some mapping up there, and had a crew on Tinian working. And we ended up, we left four miles between Tinian and Saipan. And we were flying Tinian by air all the time because the water got so rough after the storm.

They'd load those DC-3s up, barely get off the ground, stagger up, and then make an S-turn and stagger back down again. And they started, the word is staggers, and I wrote one of them one day. Everybody had it.

[Speaker 2]

I know what you mean.

[Speaker 1]

Anyway, we had been mapped after the operation. So we were doing our mapping on Saipan and putting stories out of that. The Japanese were still there up in the hills.

We knew they were up in the hills. I warned our people, and they must go out, go armed, or go out unarmed. They got the entire dragon on heavy armor to carry as light arms as possible.

But one day they came back in early, and they were taking the diary in for the armory, and they left, they were well armed, heavily armed. So I decided to follow them out and see what happened. It turned out that they were running a couple of Japs up there.

The Jap was scared of them, they were, took off, I think, but they were shooting us in a firefight and didn't do it. Another funny story about that, that survey crew, they'd been still operating and going on for a while, and they began to come in notes that we're not, that they weren't making any progress. So I decided to follow them and see what was going on.

So I get up there, and the crew go up in the field and turn at them to the various places. In fact, they found a camp called Blackstone, which is a little valley there. Anyway, after Saipan, Tinian, we were there until we left Okinawa.

Let's see, in Okinawa, we left in April 1st, 1945. It was the invasion force. We'd ourselves, it was the 10th and the 6th landing force.

And, although, I'm going to have to go over and figure it out. Anyway, they settled in some of the divisions and they went ashore and got ashore at the opposition, swung south and north and began to get into trouble. We came back to Saipan after this Kamikaze attack, I told you about it.

The first of the LST brought us back to Saipan along with the rest of the division. They turned around and took one of the regimental combat team at the 8th Marine, reinforced by some of my people and all, back up to Okinawa as a final push down the island. That's now our capital and so forth.

And that didn't last too long. I didn't go back up. We were there until they dropped the bomb.

Until August, as you know, was that. And, we had an early September occupation forces. And we were actually, actually, I had been mapping, preparing maps for the landing in Japan.

And we had them, we were half done when they dropped the bomb, the war ended. I guess I'll have to talk about Iwo Jima. We didn't go there.

We almost went there. The division almost went there, but they were, they had Tsubachi and they decided that was enough. They'd go take you out.

We were actually preparing, preparing maps to go up there. Then we'd go back to Japan. We were making maps up there down in the vicinity quarters and put the word in that they dropped the bomb or the captain surrendered it.

And then we would go up there in the occupation forces. We had to restart making more maps for different places. Maps of Nagasaki, by the way.

Of course, the time we got to Nagasaki, I didn't look at any of my earlier photographs we had. But we were there. I just saw the pictures for them a few months ago.

We left up there and left the... Go ahead, excuse me. We left there and went up the, it's a half, well, it's a sable.

It's a big Japanese naval base. To transport home. And it joined the 5th Division to transport home and I had people in the 5th Division, engineers and people.

I had trained to camp for June, so I was back home again. Came back into the States Christmas Eve, 1945.

[Speaker 2]
Christmas Eve.

[Speaker 1]
Came back, pouring on. We had, all of us, all the officers, we had one set of clean khaki. And we got up there and we were going to land looking really sharpened up.

And that's what it would be. It was a naval captain blew his ballers down just as we were just off the point. That stuff came down and it was big for us all over.

He almost got limped. And I came back and was in Captain London for a week or so to the Lord's Orders. Home and came back.

Couldn't go to see my mother and not get knocked to see Beth. I mean, so I've been up there talking to so many people up there in the States. We were down to Parris Island.

And it was deactivated, Parris Island. It was deactivated because we were not, we were not allowed to retire. We were out.

We were with an officer in the Marine Corps and Navy, I think. They let you out.

[Speaker 3]

That's right.

[Speaker 1]

And so I was just connected to be there. We had a period of time down there where we were supposed to be active and do anything around the bar. It was just a mess.

[Speaker 2]

Did you still stay in touch with some of the fellows you served with?

[Speaker 1]

Unfortunately, no. I did for a long time. I don't get to die out and whatnot.

A few years back, one of the fellows in our class wrote to me, wanted to see if we could get us a reunion together. I already backed all the names I knew about. But every time it begins, I guess you get too few.

John Craig here in Knoxville does say he was a classmate of mine a while ago. I never see John, but once in a great while, especially. I knew quite a bit of him in Birmingham, Alabama.

While I was still down there, I knew him and got with him. I lived in Chicago. There were some people up there who I know in that area.

They went off a neighbor of mine, one of our cousins. He had a leg blown off when he were dealing. Now I think that we've completely lost track.

Unfortunately, this is probably the result of moving around as much as we had. We did move around a great deal. That's the end of a good year's life, I suppose, in a way.

[Speaker 2]

What were your relationships with the civilians that you met along the way?

[Speaker 1]

What do you mean? American civilians?

[Speaker 2]

When you were overseas.

[Speaker 1]

Didn't have too many of them. We were... You saw the pictures of the Japs there.

They were not much. A few Chamorros around too. They were very, very friendly.

They were pretty American citizens most of the time I was gone. What we had to do with them was we were friendly enough there wasn't any socializing like that. In Japan proper, we were not supposed to socialize, and we didn't too much, just a little bit.

Out of curiosity, frankly. We wanted to see what the Japanese, how they really lived. Our headquarters were out in an area I think it's supposed to be a Japanese town.

We found out, I found out, you probably saw the same thing. The wealthy Japanese were pale skinned, had less slanted eyes, were taller people. We wanted to be the big Japs.

We could be big Japs. We couldn't be a Jap and bring in the big fellas. They were that kind of people.

They were almost like gentleman parents. They were well educated as a rule, and they talked to the local communities very well, better than I do. Not much to do.

Of course, partial bridges, I remember out there, pointing kind of funny things. These people were very nice. I don't know, very few of them, however.

My relationship with the civilians overseas was...

[Speaker 2]

What about with the allied troops? Did you see...

[Speaker 1]

Oh, the ones with the army, mostly, and you know, the Marines and Army get along like cats and dogs sometimes. That's about our Navy. We get along fine with the Navy.

[Speaker 2]

How about the... Did you have any contact in New Zealand with any of the...

[Speaker 1]

Oh, the New Zealanders? No. Essentially, their people were all somewhere else at that point.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah. Their troops were all in North Africa someplace.

[Speaker 1]

I was only there two short... way too short a time. I tell you, because the guys had been there a big time.

They enjoyed it. You see what happened. People came out of Butter Canal, they were soaked up with the hilarity of the Mafia.

New Zealand was a good, cool place for the beach. Pretty high country and cool. And they were able to get over this thing down there.

And they made it. So people were welcoming to open arms relatively, so they were... They didn't meet around much.

And it was a great place. I didn't... I got along with all those...

I moved up to Australia and I told you that when I worked there. And I got along fine with people up there. They loved America.

They just celebrated. In Australia, they didn't celebrate Anzac Day. When the Americans...

Celebrated the Battle of Coral Sea Day. And every cap... Every big city, they're all coastal cities, they bring in an American Navy ship or some kind.

The crew, they just feel like kings. The big bankers going up there.

[Speaker 2]

Well, you pretty well told me this, but I didn't ask you for... put on the tape. What did you plan to do after the war was over?

And did you end up doing what your plans were?

[Speaker 1]

Well, I... I didn't get my degree in civil engineering. And I planned to work as an engineer.

Which I guess essentially did. I wish I had... Now looking back on it, I wish I had...

I got on to graduate school and got an MBA, but I had learned the things MBAs learn from Harvard. A lot of accounting and so forth requires you to go into management work. I guess I probably pretty much thought that way.

Now my father had an idea. Dad unfortunately died when I was overseas, but he had planned for me to come back to the law school. Well, civil engineering and law school are awfully, awfully compatible.

You get a lawyer with a civil background, you've got a guy who's pretty well... He had two or three friends who had done this, right? Not very well.

I see. So... I didn't know that until I got home.

I got married and everything. I didn't know I was going to get married and have our gate built back. I got married when I was two.

[Speaker 2]

Did the war change you?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, probably so. I'm actually good.

[Speaker 2]

Do you think it changed the country?

[Speaker 1]

The World War II didn't change it enough. I don't think it changed it some. I think it's aware of the problems in the world, the other problems.

There's still other problems. Unfortunately, they do mobilize way too fast and back away from the problems. I don't know about that.

I don't know, but I think we just opened ourselves up to all kinds of problems from the more aggressive parts of the world to the... kept a little stronger and a little longer.

[Speaker 2]

Do you think we could have done better during the war?

[Speaker 1]

I would expect to get more training. I expect that longer training would have been helpful. I think I know it would have been.

Mind you, I'm not fussing that he could break the service, but I did see some problems with the Army. The boys didn't know what they were going to drop or what they were going to receive. They'd just been thrown into it.

They had no... I don't mean to say that. He'd gone through Paris Island, La Quantica, or San Diego.

He knew how to shoot, at least. He'd been a very smart boy. He'd still shoot around.

And the other kids weren't trained that way. Today's service, and he's been, got a highly specialized job. Very necessary.

Another distinctive thing is you and I couldn't fathom it, I don't think. So many high-tech things have been lost all in the high leagues. I would be anyway.

And yet, we both have, we think, we both have knowledge and knowledge of technology. That's just from this world. And one of our first things was to go overseas to Germany and look over this nuclear plant over there.

A couple of nuclear operations. So we go over there and we go up to the jail and we go over there and we go over there and we go over there and we go and we go over there over there over there and we go over there and we go over there I looked up and I see this damn bearded Japanese with a knife right over his head, holy moly that's a reason my .45 got up like that and realized it was a damn goat.

[Speaker 2]

Oh that's great.

[Speaker 1]

They were wandering around all over the place I think. I just think in your mind's eye it's a bearded face with a horn or something. I'm sorry to give you that idea.

So let's make a thing. I agree with you because it's a map of Japan from Saipan to various spots around the Pacific. It's pretty fantastic.

We did that and our general thought one day he'd give it to the Air Force general. I don't remember his name though. Colonel Omega.

And he wanted some more copies of it. We had like a big bed sheet type thing. We'd spread a bunch of books and down to him.

He said it would take some time to come down and he'd like to entertain you fellas. So I went down. We had to get our guys to get a drink for the bus.

We got a friend of this guy, Bob O'Hara. I mentioned him. It was Dale Skipper who blew him out recently.

And a bunch of the boys, fellas. We'd come back to our place and drink. We'd go to their place and say we had whiskey now.

Mind you, the Naval Service had it. But the other bottle, whether it was good, bad, whatever, we had it. And when we were on down in Hawaii, the guard ship loaded in.

We couldn't take it because it wasn't chartered duty. We wouldn't take it. We'd get side-pissed.

They had two ship loads out there for us. Anyway, what we did, of course, was we bought it with the mess. We bought some extra bottles.

He was a good senior NCO. He wasn't insensitive to anything. So everything was 13-foot.

But we'd keep kidding him. He had about flying up there at 20,000 feet. Safe airplane.

The other was sitting there in a tacky shirt fighting the damn Japanese. He'd come and do it with us sometimes. Yeah, we'd do it with him sometimes.

We used to go out and take rides with him. We'd fly around, take the engine out around the island. We'd go right to California.

So I'd have to go on back up. No problem. So when they had a problem, they'd call me up.

They'd say, we're going up to Japan. I know they didn't have time to even say that. They'd say, we're going to go along?

Sure. So Mike and I would go down there. We'd get on board these two different airplanes, three or four.

We took off. It was like we went to Japan. Well, that trip, I'll tell you.

I got no trouble up there, fortunately for me. We got back to camp. Safe airplane.

Just barely got back to camp. The old man was in the bed. He was just kidding me right there.

He tossed me upside down. The other one said, damn fool. You were deserted.

You were deserted. You keep going down. See, you're just a deserter right now.

We had no authorization to go up there at all. We had no reason to go up there at all. We had a good little plane to get in.

The old pilot was right there with us, believe me. So anyway, that was one of those places. That's what I think happened.

The human mind is a great thing. Maybe you're able to block out.