

VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations

Interview with

Howard Hatch

Conducted by Deb Barrett

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(Note: Corrections made to original transcript by interviewee are noted in parentheses.)

This interview is being conducted on January 14, 2006, at the Indian Prairie Public Library in Darien, IL. My name is Deb Barrett, and I'm speaking with Howard Hatch. Mr. Hatch was born on September 8, 1920, in Chicago, Illinois, and now lives in Willowbrook, Illinois. He is retired from the Chicago Stockyards, and learned of the Veterans' History Project from someone in his apartment building. Mr. Hatch has kindly consented to be interviewed for this project, and here is his story.

Howard, where were you living at the time you entered the Service? What were you doing?

We were living on the south side of Chicago, 8752 Bishop. And I was working at the Stockyards: running cattle, taking them to the scales and weighing them, and then they were out of our hands. They came in by truck and rail, and we put them in our pens – assigned pens – and we would sell them, starting at 8:00 in the morning. At 1:00 p.m., usually, we were sold out.

When did you enter the Service?

Let me say something just before that. On Pearl Harbor Day, my sister and a friend were at the movie. They came home and found out what happened. My father had been in the Marines in World War I, so I decided to go down the next day and see if I could get into the Marines. And they told me that I can to come a month away, January 8, [1943] which is what happened and I enlisted on that date.

Why did you choose the Marines – was it because your father had been there?

Oh, yes!

That's what I thought (chuckles). So you enlisted because of what had happened at Pearl Harbor.

Yeah. We were all shocked.

Why did they tell you to come back a month later?

They were so filled up they couldn't handle any more.

They had so many people coming to enlist.

Yes.

Everybody wanted to go into the Service and take some action.

A lot of people did, sure.

Where were you inducted?

San Diego.

What were your first days like? (both chuckle)

Well, boot camp is something else!

That's what I've heard!

You have a Corporal and a PFC, they were your leaders. We were pretty fortunate. We got a couple of good guys. But still, they were pretty tough. I know we had an inspection one time, and some of the guys behind you would play a trick on you. We had a bolt on the rifle, and when you brought the rifle up to address the officer inspecting you, you'd pull the bolt back. There was a little valve on the bolt – a little wheel – that if you pulled it back it took the bolt right out. So, when that happened, that's one time in inspection my bolt went off right on the ground, and here I am, and it's my fault – it's not the guy behind me who did it. So the corporal says, "Okay now, Hatch, you see that place over there – about a fourth of a mile away – you run your ass off and get there and get back and we'll get some more work done."

When you first went in, was this similar to what they do on the east coast – where they take you in the middle of the night? Or was this so many?

It happened a little bit, not a lot. We'd be out – there was a big range out there in California, later, when we went to Camp Pendleton. And we were out at night there. And one of the things that happened is, we got poison ivy. And I was lucky. I had some Fells Naptha soap with me, and I used that and it didn't continue. One of my guys got so bad he was covered almost all over his body. I visited him in the hospital, and, boy, it was ugly.

When you first got to the base, when they first brought you in, what was that like? What were you thinking when you got there? Did you know what to expect?

(Both chuckle) No, I didn't have any idea! But they talked pretty tough to us, although they were fair most of the time. If you got in trouble, though – sometimes they started selling candy. They'd go to the PX and buy some candy, and they had a sucker for that.

What happened?

Well, one guy, he had to do a lot of push-ups – like 500 push-ups. Another guy, he did something else that they didn't like. And one Sunday morning (chuckles) we heard this guy running around. He had this rifle in front of him. And he was running all up and down the wooden planks we had in front of our tents. And he was yelling, "I am stupid,

I fouled up my platoon.” (both laugh) And he was by our tent five times. And the tent area was pretty sizable. It was more than one platoon – our platoon was 62 at that time.

So you were staying in tents, not in a barracks?

We were just in tents, yeah.

Was that just because there were so many people there?

Yeah. They made a camp there called Camp Elliott, which was six miles out of Diego, up in the hills.

Six miles out of San Diego, and it was just because there were so many people there.

Yeah. They were coming in (laughs) big, big numbers.

How long was your boot camp?

Six weeks.

Just six weeks. Okay. And ...

Can I tell a little story?

Sure.

I had a girlfriend come. And we were just about finished with boot camp. And her mother was there, too. And she was a divorcee, and pretty active gal and pretty smart. And I went to town one night – my girlfriend told me she was coming, see – so I went there to visit her one night, and were up in the hotel room, and she said, “Let’s go out to dinner.” And I said, “Where you would like to go?” She said, “My mom is having dinner with some Marines. Why don’t we go down there?” We did. We sat at a separate table. But then we decided to go over and talk to them. There was a guy who I know was the head officer – head colonel or general – in Guadalcanal when they were fighting the Japanese. He was in the Air Force. And we talked to them for a while. My girlfriend’s mother said, “Why don’t you get into the Air Force?” I said, “Okay.” She said that the guy sitting next to her was in charge, among all the other top Marines. He said, “Well, just give me your name and I’ll call you over.” So I did and I got back and figured I didn’t want to do that. And I feel just so lucky that I did, because those pilots were shot down so often in that Guadalcanal battle. Even though I got on the same island it wasn’t as bad for us.

Okay. Basic training for Marines is really tough – right?

It’s notably tough.

It's notably tough – that's what we've heard.

But it's livable.

So what kinds of things did you do in basic training?

We had some special schools. We did mostly a lot of exercise and a lot of running, exercise, taking our weapon apart, and that's pretty much it. After basic training it was quite different.

How did you get through your basic training? Were you able to communicate with your family at all?

Yeah. You could write letters. Sure. But you couldn't go outside at all – you had to stay in. You were supposed to stay right in your tent area. You could go to the PX, but they were supposed to take you there. So, you just did what they told us – most of us – and some didn't and got into trouble (chuckles).

And ended up doing a lot of running! (both laughs)

A lot of extra running!

So, you had your studies there. And you did your exercise and had the rifle range and all that.

More preliminary study. A little rifle range, but not much.

Okay. And you said that was about six weeks.

Yes.

What happened after those six weeks?

At that time I was going to Camp Pendleton. I was in a small weapons activity. It was like a school. But it was more personal than a school – only a few guys were in it. And at that time our company walked up to that camp, which had to be about 60 miles anyhow, up to riverside. And I didn't have to walk. But ours was the first company in that camp, and I got a ride up there later and joined them.

Why didn't you have to walk with the rest of them?

Because I was in the study. We were working on that study, and that was pretty important, too, for small weapons.

So you got to take a ride instead of walking! You probably were glad!

Right. (Both laugh)

What do you remember about your instructors? Were there any that really stand out in your mind?

Not really. The boot camp guys were nice – they were okay. I think they were a little softer than the average, not quite as tough.

Why do you say they were a little softer?

Well, they didn't punish as much for things that could happen. They didn't look for punishment, you know. But they watched to see that you were correct, and that you loved your Springfield we had at that time.

What kind of rifle?

The Springfield.

And you said you were in contact with your family at this time?

Yes. I'd write letters quite often. A couple of times a week, anyhow.

You said your Dad had been in the Marines in World War I. Did he have any words of advice for you, or did he tell you anything?

Well, he told me about what he did. He went back and forth in the Atlantic five times, but never touched the earth. He had, with his company, he had some guys who played football, and they played a lot of football on the east coast. They had a team that played different teams around, and some colleges, I believe.

Did you get any kind of leave after basic training?

Not right after basic training. But about five or six months later I did.

Okay. So what happened after basic training?

We got in this big camp. We had regular exercises, schools and stuff. One time we were going to get some recreation. They took us to a horse racetrack, and it was Del Rey, California. A couple of movie stars owned that. The ocean was probably about half a mile away. And we stayed in the horse stalls and slept there. I had a picture of it, and I wish I had found it and brought it, but it showed us just laying down and the sun shining in these pictures. We went over to the ocean – our guys never saw oceans, most of our guys – and it was fantastic. One time, a friend of mine – I was a pretty good swimmer in high school; I was not too big, but I won some contests at local schools; I was a back stroker. Anyhow, I thought I could swim well enough. This guy got out between the sandbar and where the sandbar drops, and he started to drown. So I ran after him and I

started to drown (chuckles). Fortunately, a lifeguard just happened to see maybe when I started to run out there. But I was really gurgling because he had such a good hold on me. He was heavier than I was. And this Coast Guard Marine came up, and he pulled him off, and I got out of there (chuckles).

Okay. So you had your training, you had your advanced training. What was your ...

We did the ranges. We went up north at a camp – an Army camp – to do a range, and came back. Then we went on ships – different kinds of ships – Higgins boat, which is a smaller boat with a Lewis gun on it. Then we went on a big ship. And we had a practice run de-barking. It was about 4:00 in the morning, and we were going down the ropes

On the sides of the boat?

And the boat was moving back and forth, which means the little boat down there picking us up was just going up and down with this boat wiggling. And one of the kids dropped in between the boat and the ship. Fortunately he had a BAR – Browning Automatic Rifle – which is pretty strong. And he was able to hold it off for a little bit. But it got to a point – he was a young kid, only about 16 or 17, and he didn't weigh 99 pounds – but some swabbie picked him up by the arms, lifted him up and put him in the boat, BAR and all. So he was just lucky he got out of that.

But they did lose people. In fact, one time they had a boat that I heard of, that just – when they unload boats from the ship, that's another problem, you get the swing – and this boat was just flowing right out and gone, all hands. Probably two swabbies in there.

So just the exercises you had to prepare you were dangerous in themselves.

That's right. And we'd land on shore just like they did in Europe.

So after this training, then what happened?

We just stayed in there for a year. In 1943, we were given tickets for the Rosebowl. And a lot of us went to the Rosebowl. But we were going up and down the road. You'd get out on the road and people would give you a ride right away at that time. We were supposed to be heroes, you know. Then I got to go home and got to be a hero there (both chuckle). People don't realize what a hero is! But then in 1943 in January, we boarded a ship and went to New Zealand.

So, what was the ship that you were on – do you remember?

No, I don't. I think it had the name "Washington," and it was a [large] cruise ship! It was overdone. We slept about five or six high – maybe it was four – but you were pretty close together. Your nose was almost on the other guy's canvas.

Okay, this is 1943 in January, so you would have been 22?

Yes.

So, you went – how long did this trip take?

Thirteen days. But it was sort of, I guess, I'd stand up in the bow and I'd watch these fish – the flying fish, you know – and the seals, sometimes dolphins. It was fantastic to watch. It was good. There were some of the guys who'd shoot crabs. Some of the guys would play a little bridge. Not that time, but we had another ship we were on when we did that. When we got to New Zealand one guy was seasick all the way. They let us off the ship, some of us. And we walked up a kind of a street where the ship comes down to, and here were some of the New Zealanders there looking through the gate. This lady said to me, "How's your tucker?" I said, "How's your tucker? What do you think 'tucker' is? What's that?" She said, "Your food." I said, "It's great!" A Navy ship is better than having it in camp. The Navy has a lot of supplies there – really broad. Their soup there is so much better than what we get. We had pretty good food, though.

So you had pretty good food on the ship. You land in New Zealand. How long did you end up staying in New Zealand?

[About 5 months.] It took us thirteen days to get there, but then we moved about nineteen miles out of Auckland. And we had a camp there, and there were two companies in that camp. We were just a short distance out. They allowed us liberty, but not enough, really. Probably enough for guys like we were – you know, out on your own and stuff – anyway, they had a volunteer, mainly girls, but there would be men to help to entertain and feed us while we were in town. And it was quite an organization. And I got acquainted with one girl, and she invited me to her house, and for dinner. And it was kind of interesting to do.

So, what was your job while you were there? What were you responsible for while you were there?

Well, I was still probably a PFC, not even a corporal. We were doing mainly training. It's a beautiful place to be, but they've got a lot of hills there though. And we had a sixty mile hike one time – that's one of the things we did.

A sixty mile hike – 6, 0?

Yeah. The day I started that hike I got a brand new pair of shoes, and if you want to break in a pair of shoes (Ms. Barrett laughs) in one day – my feet were bleeding so bad I had to take them off! I started up again the next morning and I couldn't finish (chuckles). They put me in a car

Like a jeep?

And took me back to camp. So it was over for me – I didn't get the other forty miles (chuckles).

So you only did twenty!

Yeah. We did another exercise, though – a lot of exercises – but one was an attack exercise. And we had tanks there. And with this tank, we were all sitting around, a big company, and all the troops were there; it was quite an organization, probably the whole battalion. And this one tank came upon a deep creek. And when he hit that creek it was wide enough that the bottom went down with a guy sitting on top, and it came right back and hit the ground ...

Flipped over.

Flipped right over, upside down, and this one kid was standing there at the time. So, I don't know what happened to him. [He had to be crushed.]

Wow.

It was quite an unusual thing to see, and sad.

Did you have any live fire exercises?

Not so much by attacking that way, not really. We might have done a few, very few.

So, you talked about how good the food was on the ship. What was your food like when you were in camp?

It was fine. It was okay. The thing I remember most was the Salvation Army being there. And they served coffee. And they were really helpful.

I've heard that from a few people. Were you living in tents again?

Yeah.

Two-man tents?

Three-man tents – I think it was three-man. And they had a lot of dice (Ms. Barrett laughs). And one day – I wasn't in on it – but I heard the guy – he was between an officer and a top sergeant, he was really an officer, but it's not like a second lieutenant, [he was a petty officer]. ...He came down around and broke up the game and picked up the money (both laugh). He wasn't very popular at that time!

Did you communicate with your family, did you get packages and letters and things?

Yeah. My poor mother! She'd send me some candy, and by the time it got there it got to be goo, and moldy, too. But you wouldn't dare say anything to them, although I probably should have (chuckles).

Okay. And you talked about some entertainment in the town. Did you have any entertainment, like USO shows, anything like that?

Meeting that girlfriend was at the USO, at that place. But we were allowed liberty, usually on Saturday. We had to be in by Midnight, no later. But a couple of men in my outfit were there, and I was Corporal of the Day one time and I had to put them in the brig (chuckles). I'm still friends with one of them. The other one died, since.

So you did training during the day, on Saturday you got liberty and you could go to town and be back at Midnight.

On Sunday you could take it easy.

Okay. So how long were you in New Zealand?

We were there, let's see, until November. That's when we went, no, it must have been July or a little later, we went to Guadalcanal then.

So you were in New Zealand just a few months?

Yeah. I think, no, more than just a few months. Probably must have been five months.

About five months. And then you went to Guadalcanal. And you went on what type of ship?

It was another troop ship. One of the other that they made in California – Henry Crown, or something like that.

How long did it take to get there?

Not too long, probably about four days, a week.

And what did you know of what was happening in Guadalcanal?

Well, we knew the main operation was sealed. It was over. They had very few Japanese left when we got there. We went on a patrol up near a river, and we didn't do much going out. I remember one time a few of us went out, and there was a native who took us along. And we were walking along this trail, and he said to me there was a snake. "Snagee, snagee," he said. And everybody stopped, of course. They had snakes, but I didn't see many snakes, or any snakes, actually. This man came to our camp, ... and he brought his little son with us. And I was trying to get him to climb a tree, and he showed

me how to climb those trees! You know, they kind of slant. But if you tie your two feet together with a rope, you can just walk up the tree.

Oh, okay! (chuckles)

Fantastic! And I got right up to the top where the coconuts were and cut them down.

So, did they tell you why you were going to Guadalcanal? What was the purpose for being there?

No, they never tell you that when you get off the ship – not too often. We went there for combat, but we didn't know that.

Okay.

Another thing that happened at that camp, we were – there were a lot of plantations there, with livestock there; there were lizards, and kind of large ones there – we went out one time and took the jeeps. And I knew something about cattle. So we killed a cow and we put it on the trunk, and put it on the radiator and brought it back to camp. And the chef made us a meal out of it (chuckles). You look back, and those conditions – you're in a jungle out there! And the heat is so bad, things aren't very sanitary. You kill livestock there's got to be a sanitary way. But we didn't care about it. Nobody got sick over it. One of the guys would go fishing in the river. And they'd throw a hand grenade in, and a lot of fish would pop up (chuckles).

Okay. So, how long were you on Guadalcanal?

Let's see. We went to Bougainville, I think in October of 1943. So, it was the time in between there. And we were there a short time. And I developed an infection. And I had a 103° temperature the day we were going back to Guam – I mean to Guadalcanal. I got put in the tent where the medics were, and I was pretty sick. They flew me back to Guadalcanal a few days later, after they gave me some treatments. And I got sick, it was just a swollen leg, it got real big [called Jungle Rot]. ...

Why had you gone to Bougainville?

That was the battle where the Japanese were. They were all over the island. I heard in New Zealand that there were head hunters there. But that was years past. A seaman I had met in New Zealand told me that. We got up there and had a big camp up there – a line of all the troops.

This was in Bougainville?

Yes. And my partner and I, he was my sergeant. I got down in sort of a fox hole in the mountain there, and that was pretty good. But 5:00 one morning the ground started to really shake. And the logs I put in, they started to bounce. So we got out of there.

Everybody stood up out of their fox holes and all over. That was a real tough earthquake we had. One of the guys, one corporal, was supposed to lead with some material they had before we were walking up, and he stayed there about two or three days. And when he came up they punished him. They made him go out 100 yards in front of a line, and it was a real mysterious place. You'd hear all the animals and insects at night, you know, and it was scary. And I just felt sorry for him going out there (chuckles).

So, your mission while you were there was what?

Was to try and get the Japanese. We didn't get very far into it 'til we got called back, and some parachuters came and relieved us – the Army.

Okay. So you went in and the Army came in and took it from there.

We happened to have a battle, but it was at the other end of the line. There was a few guys got killed in the battalion, but we didn't hardly have any fire up on our part of the line.

So, you got called back to Guadalcanal, you said?

Yes, we went back there.

And was that your base of operations?

Yes, that was our base. It was a beautiful place, actually, in our camp. We had some wonderful trees that were lined up, like you line up corn in a row, but far apart. And one day a couple of guys – the two guys that got put in the brig in New Zealand – they had a plan. You had a place where you went to the bathroom, and they sat down. "Sewing Machine Charlie" comes over here almost every third night or so. So, when Sewing Machine Charlie comes, you go in the john and bang you seat up and down and say, "There he goes, there he goes." Well, they did that and the captain walked in on ... [the man banging the toilet seat lids.] And he got six weeks in EPD (extra police duty) (both laugh). He was sweeping everything!

I'm taking too much of your time.

No, no. Not at all.

So, when you got back to Guadalcanal after Bougainville – you came back to Guadalcanal and what did you do?

Let's see, that would be about the first of – we did some training then, not a heck of a lot. But let me figure out – we went there when it was almost Christmas, and we stayed there until I think it was about May. The operation for Saipan was going on. We didn't know anything about that. But we were in reserve for Saipan. And we were onboard ship 51 days. We were going a lot of places in the ocean, but in the ocean you don't know where you're at! We went to an island where later they dumped some of the atom bomb work.

And that's the only time we got ashore. In the meantime I read Tolstoy's book, *War and Peace*. And also we played bridge, and I lost \$2,000.

Oh my gosh! (chuckles)

Toy dollars, fortunately!

Fortunately! \$2,000 back then was a lot of money.

You made some good friends, though.

Well, good. So, you were on this boat for, you said, 51 days?

Yeah. And right after that we went to Guam. And we were in the head of that battle. We came ashore, and the first night a new sergeant we had – an older guy, he must have been about 40 – he got killed. He was right near me! And I swear there was a Japanese man that must have come so close to me, and I don't see how he got by me, he went over and just happened to crawl into the foxhole of a fellow who was pretty tough. He was a trucker in middle Illinois. Stiverson, his name was. And you could hear him hitting this Japanese major with his gun, and calling him an s.o.b., and that went on about 2:00 in the morning. But that was the only casualty we had at that time.

But then we went on from there. And what they did was brought another group that's smaller than a battalion and landed around the other side of the city, as I understand it. And then we were going to go up and attack and merge. We went around and that's where we started the big battle, actually.

On Guam.

Yes. There wasn't much battle right on the edge of the island, but some of the Japanese got through.

So you were in that big battle, then.

Yes. When we merged, one of the nights early on, we had a squad come. And they were going to our left flank where it was open between us and another company. And they were on a hill. Well, that night the Japanese had a bonzai attack, and some of them got to us. The mortars were a little behind the lines, but pretty close to the lines. One Indian there, who was in the front lines, they said he had six Japanese dead in front of his foxhole. That night a medic went over when they were coming down. You could hear the guys calling from that squad. And he went over there and I think he had to cut a guy's foot off or something. But they really hurt some of those fellows in that squad.

And a bonzai attack is like?

A shouting thing. They come. And the next morning a ... [machine gunner] – not a sergeant, a ... corporal – he called me and said, “Come over and see what’s going on.” We had our machine guns lined up to the back of the company, and there was a hill behind us that the Japanese were crawling up. Those were the guys that went through our lines. So, they just took those machine guns and they popped a lot of them off – they killed a lot of them there. But a lot of them got through and killed some men on the beach.

Now, I had read that there were a lot of not foxholes, but tunnels and things when you got to Iwo Jima. Did they use the same approach in Guam or the other places?

No. It was too open – too broad.

Okay.

There were 17 miles of tunnels there. I was in them. I know.

So you were in the battle of Guam. What were your feelings when you were going through this? Were you afraid?

Absolutely. Absolutely. I had one instance where – there were two of them – we were on the road moving forward, and we had a break. And I was a corporal at the time, not sergeant of the squad. But most of the guys were on one side of the line, and I thought, “I’m going to get on the other side.” And a voice came up. It was a Japanese running across the field see, and he came into my sight across where the road was. And I walked over there, ran over there – I knew a little Japanese – they told us, and I said, “Ryota whoa agray,” that means “Stop and hold your hands up.” He stopped, but he didn’t put his hands up and somebody shot him right down. I was going to take him prisoner, but you see what they would do, they would hold a grenade in their hands and when you came to them they’d kill themselves like they’re doing now over in Iraq.

So if you came up to them you’d be killed too.

Right. I didn’t know that, but found out later.

So it must have been quite a frightening experience. You were how old?

Heck. I had to be 22 still. Let’s see. No. I think I must have been 23 then.

23. Okay. So how long were you on Guam?

Let’s see. I think we landed in June or July, and we moved out for Iwo, probably mid-Jan. No. We had 51 days on ship. We landed in July on Guam.

Not quite two months.

Yeah.

So you ...

If I had my records straight (chuckles). We were going from Guam to Iwo. Iwo was [first assaulted on] February 19th. We landed on the 25th.

1945?

1945.

Okay. You were telling us about leaving Guam and getting ready to go to Iwo Jima, and that was in February of 1945. So you would have been 24 years old at that point.

Yeah. That's not the 51 days. It didn't take that long for Iwo Jima.

How long did it take from Guam, or from Guadalcanal, rather?

No, from Guam.

From Guam to Iwo Jima. How long was the trip?

I imagine it was about ... [five days or less].

About ... [five days]. And what did you know about where you were going and what it would be like?

We did not know until a few days after we got on the ship.

And what did they tell you?

They brought some big maps out to show just what was going on, where we were going to land, and how we were going to land, and what our goals were. Our goal was to take the second airport, and that's mainly what we studied.

Okay. And you brought the map that we got a picture of, and that's the map that you carried with it. You reduced the size of the map, rather.

Yes. When we landed there, on the first day my lieutenant got hit with a big piece of shrapnel. He was taken away. And we slept on the ground overnight – it was like sleeping on this table. The ground was hard and there was a lot of bombing going on. Both sides.

First of all, tell us, when you landed how did you land? Did you land off shore and have to come through the water?

That's right, yes.

And you landed, you showed us on the map, it was on the southeast side of the island.

Yes.

So, how did you get off the boats?

This time I think we had a boat that went down in front. And then we came up this hill – the ash there on the hill was kind of high – about six feet high. It's tough to crawl up, because of the thick grainy sand. It was black and loose.

It shifts.

It shifts on you. That's what happened to the guys who landed on the 19th – they got stuck down there and couldn't move in very easily.

Now, on Iwo Jima, the Japanese had hidden themselves very well.

Oh, had they ever! When I went back for the reunion I went into one of those holes they had.

Tell us about the holes and tunnels and things that they had.

They were all over the island – 17 miles of tunnels. They were relatively small. To look at it at the reunion, you had to go through four boards, and they were probably about 3 ½' high and 2' wide. And if you couldn't get through there they wouldn't let you go in. So, when I went in there, you could see some shelves along where people had slept or been like a hospital where they lay. And we didn't go the whole 17 miles, but we got a glimpse of them. And it was interesting to see. But they had them all over the island.

So they had really buried themselves into the earth and into the mountain. They had a lot of protection.

At one time, when I was in an attack there – after an attack, actually – I went up to the front line to see how things were. And one of the sergeants was up there, and he said, "Come on, you bastard, let's go." So a BAR man who was there was his partner, these two BAR men, they got up and started to go so I thought I'd go with them and see what was going on. So we got up ... [beyond] the front and there were shots going around, and, anyhow, the BAR man was up probably about 100 yards, maybe 70 yards, and he looked down in a hole and I looked down with him. He said, "Look at this." There was a Japanese ca there – right in there. And this fellow took his BAR and shot down in there. I don't know if he got him or not. But we went back then, to the line. And I said, "What we need is a pole charge, it's a weapon you put TNT on a board, 24 (tape turns over)

Okay. When we ran out of tape, Howard was telling us about finding Japanese at the front lines in a hole in the ground, basically. And what they were looking for was some sort of weapon to handle this.

What we needed was a pole charge. And a pole charge was a block of TNT and you could go out. And so, I said, "Well, which one of you guys is going to take this?" And nobody offered, so Hatch says, "Okay, I'll go, but you guys keep shooting over my head as I go." So I was fairly safe, actually. So, it was quite a trip up to that hole. And I got it. And there's a fuse on it that you pull, and I put it in there. Going up there was something else. The trenches that the Japanese ... [used to crawl through] ... were probably about 10" deep. And probably less than 2' wide. You scurried around them with elbow and shoulders down in there, and I didn't have a rifle with me, even. I just had that pole charge. So I got up there and put that in, and when I got back staying down low enough the guys were firing above me all the time. So I got back and we waited, and it didn't go off. So, I said, "Something's wrong with the fuse." So we got another piece of TNT, and I went up the same way and it didn't go off the second time! So the third time, what I did was take the piece of dynamite and lie down, like I did the second time. And we shortened the fuse. And I cut it off a little bit and started it, and it blew up. It took longer than I expected it to make, though, but it blew stuff way over to us and we got a lot of dust and dirt out of it – nothing big, but they've got some rocks around there, too.

Okay. And you said you felt pretty safe because your buddies were firing over your head.

Sure.

Now, I would imagine that there was a lot of Japanese fire coming to, coming at you.

Well, they couldn't stick their heads out, you know, at that time of day. I think we almost got more firing from them at night. They'd send their bombs out. They had a thing – a goofy thing that would go up in the air, it was pretty sizable. ... It was a bomb. It had like a firecracker that would go up, a rocket that would go up. And it wobbled, and they couldn't be sure where that landed. They weren't very good with that particular weapon. But they did kill several Marines – quite a number, I expect.

So, when you came back from this experience with the pole charge and making it work, you were at the front lines. Did you pull back a little bit then?

Well, now, the front lines stayed where they were. I was usually a little bit behind them. And then the mortars were back probably about 50 yards, something like that, or 30 yards.

Did you have a specific assignment when you were there – something you were supposed to do?

Yeah, you had to probably figure it out yourself, mostly. We had four captains. The first night we lost one captain. I think he went back to the hospital. The second night a captain was killed. And getting along probably around the 9th or 10th I was, we were up further north. And we had a different run at 4:00 in the morning we had to do a special attack. Afterward we realized what happened – our line went in a rotate, and they were open for the enemy. I didn't know that! I started up with the wire and a carbine, and a phone in my clothes. And I got up to this one place and a bullet, I swear, almost hit me in the pants it got so close. I dove into a hole, and a guy came by ahead of me, and I said, "Where's the captain?" I'll get his name in a bit, I think. And he said, "He's just up around the hill here." So I figure, well, this sniper, he's going to get me again if I lay here long enough. So I'm getting up and my rifle was hit in the muzzle – where the band holds the muzzle to the stock. And the rifle, when that happened, when he shot, just fell apart. So I didn't have a rifle at that time, either! That took it away from me. There were plenty of rifles around, but at that time I wasn't thinking about a rifle – I was thinking about getting to the 3rd captain, Lieutenant Clemens, from Joliet, IL. And I went up and the captain wasn't more than twenty feet away from me, and a shot went right through his temple. And his mouth went up and his eyes went up and his head went down, and he was dead. And I dove in another hole.

And you were how close to him?

Within twenty, twenty-five feet.

So you saw this happen.

... [I jumped in a hole]. So we had to go out at night and pick up some fellows who were [wounded] out there. And the guy who was running the company at that time – it was a different guy – that was a few hours apart. He came and said, "I want somebody to go up with us to pick up some injured." I said, "How about my going." He said, "No, you get somebody yourself." Well, we just got a young kid in – I wish I hadn't done it, I wish I'd have gotten somebody else, but it doesn't matter – I sent him up there and he got killed that night. That was pretty tough.

Yes, I can imagine.

He was only nineteen years old. The first time.

And at 24 you probably felt like an old man.

Oh, yeah. I was getting old – pretty old.

When the Marines were going to pick up the bodies of the Marines who had been killed, what did they do with the bodies?

I think they buried them right there [on the island. A large cemetery was there.]

Did they?

Yeah, on the island. There were a lot of graves there at one time. But when I went on the reunion there were no graves – they took them all out. I went to Pearl Harbor to see if I could find them, and I saw a couple of names I knew at Pearl Harbor. They were sent to the cemetery there.

So you were – let's see, the fighting was still going on, on Iwo Jima.

Yes.

How long was the fighting going on?

I think they called a success, or the battle over, on the 16th of March.

March 16th.

I got hit, after this episode I was just talking about, we took ourselves up kind of north – not right to the sea, but kind of north around these places we were heading to. In the meantime we were moving forward some. But we went around this place and it got late – dusk – and I was just orienting the line with the mortar to aim the machine. And I was standing up in the hole above my knees, and the shot hit me in the hip.

Okay.

So, I went down and said, “The son of a ‘b’ hit me.” So, finally – it took a while for medics to get there, four of them – there was still firing going on. They put me on ...

The stretcher?

A stretcher, right. And the stretcher is up off the ground about ten inches. And when they had it up and they started shooting again, well, they put the stretcher on the ground and they got down low, you know. And here, I'm up above the ground with this shooting gallery going on (both chuckle). It didn't feel very good to get tied down there. But then they sent me back to Guam the next day.

So how long had you been on the island when you were injured?

From the 25th of February to the 12th of March. ...

So, you were there almost three weeks without getting hit.

Oh, I was hit another time.

When was that?

The first attack. We were moving up and I got a piece of shrapnel up here.

On your left shoulder.

I felt it was bleeding, see. So a medic was right there and he looked at it. He put a bandage on it and said, "You'll be all right." And then he reported it and that gave me the Purple Heart.

Okay. The Purple Heart was when you got the shrapnel.

Yeah. That gave me the first Purple Heart. Then I got a star – you see the star in there for a second wound.

Okay. So you said you were moving north – that's when you were hit. They took you on the stretcher. What happened?

The next morning I got there on a plane and they flew me back to Guam. And those were two flights – I had one from Bougainville back to Guadalcanal, and it's the most beautiful scene you could see; and they sent me to the hospital. I was in the hospital five days. And so, I wasn't really seriously wounded. I was a little bit paralyzed. Even with my bladder, I couldn't use that for a short time. I went back to camp and the lieutenant was there. And ...

Which lieutenant was this?

The lieutenant that was hit with the shell. He said, "You know, you carried this bag around the island longer than anybody else." So he said, "I'm going to offer you something out of there." So I took the maps. Was I glad I took the maps!

And that bag was part of what you were supposed to carry. Tell us about the bag and what was in it.

Well, they had a lot of different information and instructions and the maps, mainly. I didn't really go over a lot of it, to be honest with you (chuckles). It was so quick! We had to be so fast, and to take that map out in that area it doesn't make too much sense. But you can follow it a little bit. And I got a better look at it by putting it down smaller in size, actually, like the one I carried here.

So you were on Iwo Jima a little less than a month.

Yes.

And then you were flown back to Guam. You were treated for your wounds. How long were you there?

Not very long – probably four or five days. And we got on a big ... [cruiser] – not an aircraft and not the biggest ... [cruiser], but the second biggest ... [cruiser] – and they took us back home. I had enough points at that time, being over there so long, overseas, you got points to go back.

Okay. And how did the point system work? Do you remember?

It's by the time you're there, each month you get so many points. You get, I don't know, like 22 points or something like that and then it's time for rotation, normally. Unless something goes awry and they have some emergency. Then they treat you differently.

Right. So you went – you were still in the Marines, but you were home, or did they send you back?

No, the war ended.

I went home and I went to New Jersey.

Where in New Jersey?

Near – oh, gosh. I should know. It was where the pilot who lost the baby – kidnapped baby ...

The Lindbergh baby?

The Lindbergh baby, yeah. It was right near where he was. I can't tell you the name.

Okay. Was it a camp?

No, it wasn't a camp. It was some kind of a supply depot.

Okay. And what were you doing in the supply depot? What was your responsibility?

I was just on guard, on corporal duty, on guard. I'd go ashore. I'd go to New York. I went to different places. I didn't go down to the gambling place, though.

And how long were you there?

Oh, I think maybe from July 'til the war ended – September, or it was late August it ended, I think. And then I stayed there until, not the middle of September but a little earlier than that.

And how did it feel to be on that kind of duty after what you had been through?

It felt kind of relaxed. It felt sort of free, you know.

So then, in September, what happened to you?

Well, they sent me to Chicago, here, where the Navy was – outside of Chicago. And that's where I was let go.

At Great Lakes?

Yeah.

At Great Lakes Training Center?

Right.

And so you were discharged in what month?

I'd say September. Maybe it was the 19th.

September 19, 1945?

Yeah.

How did you feel when you were discharged? What was it like?

Well, I felt pretty good. But I felt as though I didn't know exactly what to do. I should have had a little better. I don't blame them at all. I blame myself for it. But I did all right with my life. I worked one place 30 years, another one 16. So.

There was one other thing I wanted to ask you. You came home before the flag was raised on Iwo Jima?

No.

You were there and you saw it?

I was there, it was about the fifth day [when we landed]. The flag was raised on March 24th, 1945. ...

Okay. Okay. So you didn't see it happen.

No.

But you saw the flag up there?

We knew it happened.

Did you see it or no?

No. I don't recall it. I wasn't looking at it. It was dark when we got there. And I think we got a distance. The next morning we made a move, a pretty fast move. One guy right next to me got his arm blown off, as I told you. But we got in a little hole that they had. And in there, what happened is, we were in a round place. And even the company commander was near us. And somebody said, "Look out!" And everybody went down as low as possible. And it was a Navy shell – it was a shell of our own that hit right where we were. But it was a dud, fortunately, it didn't go off. But one of my men started to sit up after it was over, and he sat right on the nose of that shell! (Ms. Barrett chuckles) His legs were moving, and his arms were moving! And I laughed at him. Some of them didn't laugh.

Okay, so when you were discharged in September of '45, you went home, what was it like right after you got home?

It felt kind of empty in a way. My best friend got killed – he was in a submarine. And I had some other friends, but I started work right away. I didn't think about college. I did go to college, actually. I went to Northwestern night school. And I lasted about a week there. I couldn't understand it at all. I mean, the work that a lawyer does is so complex that I didn't feel qualified to be in it. And so, we got busy at our work and I just stayed working.

So you tried going to college. Was that on the GI Bill?

No. I just went.

Just on your own?

Yes.

Okay. So you basically went back to the stockyards where you had been before.

Right.

Did you go back to doing the same kind of work?

Oh yeah. I did for a while. Then I started to sell – my grandfather was there – and he had me start to sell calves and bulls.

Okay. Have you had any contact since the war with any of the buddies you made there?

Oh, I sure have. I have contact, not regularly, but often. There's two guys in California ... and one in Arizona. They formed this reunion for us, going to Vegas. And I've been there about four times.

Okay. Was that for the men who were in your company?

Yes. Right. Some would bring their wives. My wife doesn't care to go. She was in the Army. And she just doesn't have very much interest in the services. I think they treated the girls in the Army pretty badly sometimes.

Okay. You made some close friends when you were in the Marines.

Oh, yeah.

And you still keep some of those up.

Yeah.

Are you part of a veterans' organization?

Yeah. I'm signed up with Disabled Vets. And that's about all. Just because I got a Purple Heart, I'm entitled to that.

And you attend reunions. You said you have. And you brought some medals. We didn't get to talk about those yet. Could you just tell us a little bit about the medals that you have?

Well, they're for where you were.

Do you see this?

Yeah. (There is rustling in the background as Mr. Hatch sorts through the medals he brought to the interview.)

I know we mentioned your Purple Heart. It was actually, you said, a Purple Heart with a star?

Yeah. Let's see. This is American Campaign. That came later.

American Campaign. And what was it for?

Well, just America at war. And this is World War II. And there's a Service Ribbon, I think this is it, from the President. It's not a medal, but it's a ribbon you can put on. This is the Asiatic Pacific Campaign. This is the same – I don't know how I got that extra one. That's about it.

And you have your Purple Heart. Can I see your Purple Heart?

Oh, yeah. That's it there.

A Purple Heart with a star. And the star means a second injury in combat. Okay.

I don't know if they put third or fourth on there.

“For military merit,” it says on the back. Okay. So, you were in some combat, some experiences that we’ve all read about in history books – some very difficult campaigns. How does your military experience influence your thinking about war or the military in general?

Oh boy. I don't know what to think. You'd get into it and then afterwards you'd think, “Why are we doing this?” And sometimes, you know. Like Vietnam. You're okay if it works, and you're not okay if it doesn't work as far as I'm concerned. I think people are doing as well as they can – I'm a Democrat, myself. But I don't feel like you should sacrifice somebody because they make a mistake right away, but politics is politics. I'm glad I'm not deep in it – I just watch the voters. Try to get them to vote.

So how did your wartime service end up affecting your life?

Well, it's a lot of good and bad. I don't feel too bad about anything. It was quite an experience. I just feel lucky that I was able to live and get through it. And sad that there were losses of people that were so important – more than I am, I know -- in this world, to build it, to keep it going. I feel lucky I have a family. I have two adopted children, and another we had after we were married 16 years (chuckles). And I feel lucky to have them.

So, if your grandchildren ask you what war is like, do you tell them?

It's terrible. Although my granddaughter asked me to give a talk similar to what we're having in her high school. And I just told about what I said here – maybe a little bit better because I was a little younger then (chuckles).

Okay. Is there anything we haven't covered that you would like to add before we finish this interview?

Oh, a few events.

One event was going to Bougainville, where a colonel came to tell us what we were going to do. And he was saying, “When I was aboard ship on training,” he said, “we had a chef who was in charge of the announcements on the ship.” And he said almost every day, often he'd come up with a notice of a fire: “Fire in the galley, fire in the galley.” And one time, after half a dozen times this happened, he said, “The chef came on and said: ‘Fire in the galley, fire in the galley, and no shit this time!’” (Both chuckle) His name was Hymie Sabatuer, [a West Point graduate and battalion commander]. He was from Puerto Rico. Everybody liked him. He was a little guy, but fleshy guy, nice guy. And, anyhow, he said, “Boys, that's what's happening now. We're going to be in it and

we want you to be warned to do your best. And when you go in and land, don't stop. Push on. We got thousands of men. (Both laugh) I liked that one.

One other thing. The raising of the flag on Mount Suribachi on Iwo Jima is what people – that's the image of the Marine Corp that people have. And I know it's at Arlington Cemetery, there's a replica, a monument there.

Yes. I've seen it.

You were there. What is your feeling when you see that?

That flag?

That flag, that monument, that image of those Marines and that medic raising the flag.

One of the things that happened is my son took me there with my grandson, when he was four years old.

Took you ...

To Washington, D.C., on Fathers' Day. And I felt lucky to be there. But a four-year-old isn't very interested in much like that, you know. So we were concentrating on him. I thought it was pretty appropriate to have. And the Vietnam exhibit was just amazing. And I went a second time. And I saw – I think it was the Korean statue that they have.

Through the rice paddies.

They were fantastic, too. All of those memorials, they really stick out and show sort of what it was like.

Okay. Is there anything else before we go off record here?

I guess not.

Okay. Well, thank you very much. We're going off record now.