Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone. I’m conducting an oral history interview with Mr. Harry Pearce. Today is December 9, 2003. We are in Hanover, Kansas, in Mr. Pearce’s home. Harry, why don’t we start with some biographical information on yourself?

Harry Pearce: Fine.

RV: Could you tell us when you were born, where you were born and a little bit about growing up?

HP: I was born in Milford, Delaware on October 16, 1922. My mother’s maiden name was Evans. The Evans family came to this country in the early 1500’s. I have relatives that were married to signers of the Declaration of Independence. I have another one that was married to the man by the name of Bacon, who led Bacon’s Rebellion. It’s old family. They settled in what is now known as Philadelphia. At one time the family was extremely wealthy and they owned all of the wharves on the Philadelphia Harbor. They were merchants, and they had ships, a hundred and ten of them that sailed around the world and brought spices back to this country. Later on I think they were probably guilty of bringing slaves to this country.

RV: Okay.

HP: My father’s family twin brothers married twin daughters in England. They came to Pennsylvania in the early days and set up work in a place called Latrobe, Pennsylvania, what they called the Pearce woolen mills. They made the famous Pearce blankets. During World War I and World War II the government bought these wool blankets for the Army, Navy and Marine Corps. They were Pearce blankets. My father
was a graduate of Penn State College, class of 1910. After graduation he worked for the Baltimore and Ohio Railway and then took a job in South America as chief engineer under Goethals on the Panama Canal. The government took over from France in 1911. My father went down and went to work for a Frenchman and he made the first and only survey that’s ever been made of the boundary lines of Columbia for the Columbian government.

RV: How did he get that job?

HP: He went to South America to work for the government on the Panama Canal. He was supposed to come down as a single man. He arrived as a young married man and they had no facilities for married people so they canned him. He went to work for this Frenchman, and I don’t know his name doing this survey for the Columbian government. After that he was rehired as chief engineer under Goethals on the Panama Canal and his project was the Collebra Cut. After the canal was completed, my father was an independent engineer. He built on the island approaches, both sides of the Panama Canal. He built the fortifications on these islands for the government.

RV: Government of?

HP: Of the United States.

RV: Okay.

HP: The United States at that time was operating the Panama Canal and the approaches were guarded in case of an attack. In 1923, my father and my mother and myself went to Denver, Colorado. My father was a consulting engineer and he built the Denver Power and Light Plant for the city of Denver. After that the family moved to Sandusky, Ohio and my father built the breakwaters and piers for the city of Sandusky. After that we moved to North Carolina, a place called New Holland where my father drained the Matamuskeet Swamps for the federal government. It was here that we lived in a little old wooden hotel. I had a cousin that came to visit. The hotel had a sewer system that emptied into a big bowl in the backyard. As a young child I managed to fall in.

RV: Oh, no.

HP: My girl cousin got me out; my father asked me what had happened and I told him a frog had kicked me in. From North Carolina my father went to a company called
the Solvay Process Company, which was a branch of the Allied Chemical and Dye. His job was to be a superintendent of a rock quarry in Moline, Kansas that was to produce limestone rock for a chemical plant in Hutchison, Kansas. All of this was prior to 1929. The plant, the chemical plant was built but never produced a pint of chemical. The Depression came along so the plant was never opened and the company straddled my father with the job of recuperating all of the money for the building of the chemical plant plus all of the money from putting up the rock quarry. His job was to sell rock in whatever manner he could to recuperate their entire millions of dollars of investment. It took him from 1925 until 1940 to recuperate all of the company’s money.

RV: And he did so?

HP: He did so.

RV: Harry, let me ask you a couple of things. What memories do you have of Colorado or Ohio or North Carolina besides falling into the sewer?

HP: Only memories I have of Bolder, Colorado was it was cold and snowy. So it had to be in the wintertime. This was 1923 so I wasn’t very old in 1923.

RV: What about North Carolina?

HP: I don’t remember anything about Sandusky. I have seen the piers and breakwaters since then but I don’t remember being there. I do remember being in North Carolina. There was a river there in North Carolina that dumped out into the sea. The water from the swamps was being pumped into this river. This girl cousin and I managed to get into a wooden rowboat without oars. She pushed the thing out from the shore and we headed out to sea when somebody found us.

RV: You actually got out into the ocean (laughs)?

HP: No, we never reached the ocean but we were on the way in our boat.

RV: What did your father do?

HP: She got a spanking (laughs). I was way too young to be corrected.

RV: You had mentioned something about Ocracoke Island to me.

HP: My father took me as a child to Ocracoke Island, which was on the outer banks of Carolina. At that time there was nobody on the island. There was building there that they called the castle. The castle supposedly belonged to Blackbeard the pirate, Henry Morgan. I can remember my father taking me out there on the weekend. We
camped on the sand, went into this old building and down in the lower portion of it were leg irons. I was scared stiff for fear Blackbeard was going to come back and grab us all. I don’t know what it is today. But in those days there was nobody on the island, just the one building.

RV: You were talking about your father and the Depression, having to recoup this. What are your memories of the Depression?

HP: Of what?

RV: Of the Depression.

HP: We moved to Kansas in I think it was 1925 or 1926. These were the days of wild living because everybody was drinking pretty heavy and parties were going even in the small town that we lived in.

RV: Which town was that?

HP: The town was Moline (coughs). Excuse me. Moline, Kansas. It’s in Elk County in the Southeastern part of Kansas. When the Depression hit everybody was hunting work. There were many people in Kansas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri who could not find jobs and they were heading west to California. They used to come through town in Model-T Fords loaded to the hilt with wash tubs, mattresses, bed springs, anything hanging on the sides, pots and pans heading towards California which was supposed to be the Glory Land, the Land of the Promised. Many men left their families from wherever they came from, just walked off and left them. They came through on trains as bums. They would get off the train, which stopped to fuel and to take on water. They would go through town trying to get a free meal or something to eat. I can remember them coming to the house. My father always said that somebody put a chalk mark on our sidewalk out front indicating that this was the house that would feed you. My stepmother used to ask them if they would work for their meal. Some would and many of them would not. So some got fed and she had little odd jobs for them to do. If they did the job, then she fed them.

RV: Harry, let me ask you if you don’t mind. What happened to your mother?

HP: My mother passed away in 1929. This was a time when the whole area was having flu. My father sent her out to Bolder, Colorado for the wintertime hoping that the high area would cure her flu because they didn’t know what to do for it. She died in
April of 1929 from the flu. She was buried in Milford, Delaware, which was her hometown where the rest of her family was. Then in 1931, my father remarried a woman that he had known when he lived in South America in Panama. She was my stepmother and she was the stepmother to my half brother. My father was married three times.

HP: His first wife was the granddaughter of Admiral Cook. Cook, as you know was a great discoverer of the islands in the Pacific and Western Pacific. After he took his first wife to South America with him, they had two children, two boys. Douglas and Donald. Donald was the oldest by one year. Donald came down with a sickness that nobody knew anything about. My father brought him back to New York and they discovered that he had swallowed some kind of an intestinal parasite that perforated his stomach and all of his intestines and he literally died from the inside out. Shortly after that Hazel, his first wife, passed away and she was brought back to this country and buried in Milford, Delaware. She has since been interred and moved back to Latrobe, Pennsylvania, which was her hometown. Douglas, the second boy, when he was about seven years old was playing with some natives with sharpened sticks and he fell and the stick penetrated his right eye, passed behind the nasal passage, came out his left eye. So he was legally blind all of his life. But in spite of this he finished grade school and high school in Moline and went to college at Kansas University and University of Missouri at St. Louis. Graduated in art and was a commercial artist. He went to California in 1932 and worked for MGM studios out there as an artist doing period costume design for them.

RV: And he’s blind?

HP: Sir?

RV: He’s blind?

HP: Yes, at a later point in time he got into ceramic work after World War II and he worked for a GI and he made the original models for him for which he was paid seventy-five dollars a model. The GI molded a hundred of each of these and they were sent to Tiffany’s and different places in New York and Washington and Boston. After the hundred were gone there were no more made. So the GI got a good price for the articles that my brother was making for seventy-five dollars. Later on after this episode he taught school in Hollywood with the League of the Blind. I often asked him how do you teach a blind child what is red, what’s green and what’s blue. How do you teach
them colors? He said, ‘For instance red is hot.’ He said, ‘I would let them feel something warm and something hot so that they knew that red was different than something warm.’ He did this for a while. Then eventually he got to the point where he couldn’t do that anymore. He ended up living all of his life as single man in Hollywood. He’s buried in Hollywood. I went to grade school and high school in Moline, Kansas. After I graduated from high school I went to Kansas State College at Manhattan.

RV: Let me ask you then what are your memories of Moline? You started to describe them. What are your biggest memories of the Great Depression in Moline? What did you see?

HP: As I said we saw the bums coming through town. We saw people passing through in their old Model-T Fords heading west. So far as the town’s people were concerned with the operation of the quarry they employed about five hundred people not only from Moline, but from the surrounding towns. So the town itself and the people were not really hit too hard by the Depression because most of them had a job if they wanted to work. This was unusual because the people coming in town, they didn’t want to work in a quarry but there was work there if they wanted to. It was a poor time. People didn’t have a lot of money. But everybody had a garden. As far as the countryside was concerned there was a house almost on every a hundred and sixty acres. They all had a cow, an old sway back cow and a couple of pigs and a few chickens and a garden and they managed to eat, which the people from the larger cities which had no work or no garden and no yard they had nothing to turn to. But the smaller communities were able to manage to get by during this time.

RV: So tell me who was in the household? It was your father and your stepmother.

HP: My father and my stepmother, my half brother Douglas and myself. This constituted our household.

RV: Tell me about school. What kind of student were you?

HP: That’s a good question. In grade school and I think in those days they were not near as strict as they are now. I was a straight A student. It wasn’t that I was bright. I just think maybe it was personality.

RV: You were determined?
HP: Sir?

RV: Were you determined to do well?

HP: I don’t think I even thought about it in terms of doing well. It was just a matter of getting on to the next grade I think. At this particular time, boys living on the farm they had a lot of work to do. They had chores. So we had boys in high school that were eighteen to twenty-one years old that were freshmen in high school. In those days your country schools would take you through the eighth grade. In order to come to a city school, you had to pass a county examination. If you passed it, then you could go to a city school and be a freshman in high school. If you didn’t pass it, that was it. There was no way to get back into school. So we had boys that were in the fall of the year, they couldn’t come because they had to get crops in. Then come wintertime they could come to school, but they had to walk to school or ride horseback in order to get to city school. In the spring of the year they were out again in order to plant crops. So their education was delayed where the boys in town, we got to go in the fall of the year and through the winter and into spring too.

RV: So you didn’t have that problem?

HP: No I didn’t have it. When I got into high school like all the other boys I played football and basketball, track, in the band, in the glee club. We had all of the things that I think students have now. I think they have a few more now than what we had then, but most of us participated in those things.

RV: Were you still a good student?

HP: I got through. You had to have a grade point average in order to get into college. So all I could say is I had the grade point average that it took to get into college.

RV: Did you have any favorite subjects?

HP: No, I’ve always been an outdoor person. I hunted and fished and spent my time outside. Our courses in school were reading, writing and arithmetic, the three Rs, which I don’t think they’re getting today, but that’s the way it was then. When I went to college, my father was a civil engineer and he thought I ought to be an engineer. I said, ‘Well I’ll be a chem engineer.’ I never had a drop of chemistry in my life. Didn’t even know how to write the word in fact. It took one semester to find out that I wasn’t going to be a chem engineer.
RV: Let me ask you Harry, what year did you graduate high school?
HP: I graduated in 1940.
RV: Was it expected that you would go to college, or did you want to go to college?
HP: Both. I know my father wanted me to go. I think at that point I think I realized if you were going to go any place in this world you had to have an education. Out of my graduating class, I think there were seventeen in the class, in high school there were five of us out of the seventeen who got to go to college. So really in those days it was a privilege. There were a lot of kids that wanted to go to college, but their parents just didn’t have the money and couldn’t send them.

RV: How did you decide on Kansas State?
HP: As I said, I played football in high school and just before graduation I think I had six letters from different colleges, junior colleges mostly, offering me a scholarship if I’d come play football for them.

RV: What position did you play?
HP: I played full back. For a high school kid I was six-one and I weighed a hundred and ninety-five pounds, which was pretty good sized for a high school boy. I had worked physically hard all my life. I worked in the fields and what have you. I was pretty solid, but for some reason I didn’t want a football scholarship. Now as I look back on it, I don’t know why. I just didn’t want one. I couldn’t see that was something I wanted to make a living at, playing football. Of course you know there was no NFL to go to in those days. So you played a little college football and then you were dropped. I couldn’t see that as making a living for the rest of my life. My father and I talked it over and we got to talking about his engineering. He said, ‘If you want to be a chem engineer they offer that at Kansas State.’ The other thing my father had been a charter member of the fraternity called Theta Xi, which was a National Fraternity. He was a charter member of the Pennsylvania chapter of Theta Xi. He knew there was a Theta Xi Chapter at Kansas State. He wanted me to be in the same fraternity that he had been in, which I did join when I went to Kansas State. So you asked my why I got there and this is why.

RV: Well tell me about what your impressions are when you go to Manhattan and how you did in college?
HP: How what?
RV: How did you do in college? What were your impressions of Manhattan?
HP: I didn’t do worth a damn.
RV: Why?
HP: I’ve asked my self that question a hundred times, why? Number one I don’t think coming out of a small town of nine hundred to a thousand people with a small school behind me that I was qualified because when I went into school, into college, I ran into boys that had had chemistry and had physics and higher math up through calculus. I hadn’t had any of that. Second thing is the second week I was there I met a young lady that caught my eye. The first time I met her I went back to the fraternity house and told my roommate, ‘I just met the woman I’m going to marry.’ He laughed at me and a little over a year later we were married. To this day we’re still married and it’s been over sixty-one years to the same woman.
RV: That’s great. What was that first meeting like? Did you meet her on campus or in a class?
HP: Well, she was a sorority girl. We had policy in those days where one night a week we would go to a sorority house and have an hour dance with the girls or they would come to our fraternity house for an hour. It was just one night a week and we alternated sororities and fraternities. So I had gone to this sorority to meet the pledge president, who was president of their pledge class to talk about when we were going to have this hour dance. When my anticipated wife walked down and sat down between me and the president I immediately caught a pair of blue eyes that caught my heart. That’s when I decided right then that she was the one for me. She was a little thing. She probably didn’t weigh a hundred pounds dripping wet, but oh my, she was beautiful. To this day she’s good looking gal. You asked how I met her; this is how I met her. It was a fiery romance. She had other boyfriends and I had to drive them off. I often think of the bull in the pasture and I often think about the buck deer, how he has to drive off his rivals. I knew I had to drive mine off and I did. One little incident was I had walked her home from college in the fall of the year and we were sitting in the front yard. One of her ex- former boyfriends walked up and was talking to her. I got a little hot underneath the collar. I figured I was being horned out. So I looked him right in the eye and I said,
‘June and I are going down in the basement and play ping pong. I don’t know what the hell you’re going to do.’ For Christmas the boys in his fraternity gave him a ping-pong paddle (laughs).

RV: Did he leave?

HP: He left.

RV: So academically you didn’t do so well?

HP: Academically, no. My heart just wasn’t in it. I was more interested in the girl I was going to marry I think.

RV: What was her name?

HP: June Frances Burton. She was from Topeka, Kansas. Her father was with the Federal Home Loan System in Topeka. He was Vice President of Federal Homeland Bank. He was district inspector for Federal Home Loan Banks in Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska and Colorado. He was the one that would go around to the Federal Home Loans and tell them how much money they could have to loan out to people wanting homes. Her mother was a German woman; she was from Green River, Wyoming. Her father came to Green River in the early days when they were putting through the railway in the Northern Pacific. He built a house right next to the railroad tracks, a big place, a big mansion place, then put up a brewery. He sold the brewery to the Chinese that were building the railroad. His beer was shipped all over Wyoming by rail and he made quite a bit of money through his brewery. Somewhere along the line he let somebody talk him into buying some sheep. He was one of the first ones to bring sheep into the cattle country of Wyoming. They started the damn ranch wars between the sheep men and the cattlemen. Her mother had an uncle that was the first sheriff of Sweetwater County. He had quite a legend build up as to his powers of being a sheriff in the early days. Her (June’s) father was one of several children of a family in Oklahoma. His mother was Cherokee Indian. Her maiden name was Faircloth. Her parents came from Tennessee. His father, old man Burton, lived to be ninety-eight years old and he was a one-armed man. He had a story that he used to tell that he was one of fourteen children that came west in a covered wagon from Kentucky. He traveled down south into Mississippi and then cut across Louisiana and came to the area where Louisiana and Texas butt up against the rivers there. He said that at the river they had a fairy to take
people across the river. He said they had seven wagons, three loads of furniture and there
were fourteen kids in his family. Several cattle and chickens and pigs and what have you.
Said they took the furniture across first, then came back and got the cattle and the
chickens and the pigs and what have and took them over. Then last they came back and
got the kids. He said, ‘When we reached the other back of the river there was a sign
stuck on a pole in the river with a closed fist and a finger pointing. It said, “This way all
ye good Baptists to the promised land of Texas.”’ He said my folks were Methodist and
couldn’t read and we ended up in Oklahoma (laughs).

RV: Getting back to Kansas State, this is 1940. Did you stay into 1941?
HP: Well the war broke out of course December 7, 1941. At this time I was
living in the fraternity house. It was on a Sunday when the news broke the Japanese had
sunk the Pacific fleet. We had men in the fraternity house that were members of the
ROTC and many of the ROTC officers reported in that day and were taken immediately
into the Army.

RV: Do you remember how you felt that day?
HP: How I felt?
RV: Yes, sir.
HP: We just couldn’t believe that it had happened. Just no way that Japan could
come in and sink our Pacific fleet. When the full realization hit us, well then everybody
was upset over it. We felt like we ought to do something and do it now and not put it off.
A lot of the guys withdrew from school and enlisted right then. I stayed on for another
half a semester and they set up a draft system. I knew it was a matter of time until a
single man and your draft status would be such that you would be drafted into the service.
I quit, dropped out of school. I was confused, not knowing what to do. My folks were
living in Baton Rouge, Louisiana at the time. So I went home and told my folks I had
withdrawn from college and that I was thinking about the service but on the other hand I
felt like I ought to get married. My father just blew his stack.

RV: Really?
HP: He said, ‘No, you’re not going to get married, you’re going to go to college.’
He said, ‘I can get you in down here at LSU.’ So unbeknown to me he went out, we had
a fraternity chapter there. He went out and got with the fraternity boys in there and they
put a rush on me that wouldn’t quit. I ignored it all. They fought me for a week and I kept telling my father, ‘It’s not going to work. I’m not going back to college.’ In the meantime I got a job with the Army Air Force at Harding Air Force Base in Baton Rouge. My job there was a teletype operator. I was sending and receiving coded messages having to do with the number of airplanes on the base that were in for repairs, their serial numbers, what was wrong with them when they’d be repaired back to duty. I was working what we called swing shift. I worked from eight to four one day, and four to midnight the next night and midnight to eight the next night.

RV: Now was June with you?
HP: Sir?
RV: Did June come down with you?
HP: Yes, we were married in Baton Rouge. We had a little garage apartment on what we called Lover’s Lane. I was making a hundred and sixty dollars a month, not a week, but a month. I was buying a used automobile, some furniture and food. And when it was all over with we had enough money left over each month to buy a six-pack of Cokes and go to a movie once and pay our bills. But we were living high on the hog.

RV: What did you know about World War II? Were you keeping up with the progress of the war?
HP: Of course it was in the newspapers everyday as to what was going on. My father-in-law had been a captain in the Marines in the Santiago uprising. He thought he was going to go back into the Marines as a major. Fact is he bought his uniform and everything ready for it and the Marines never called him. My wife had a brother by the name of Bob who in his early life went to a military school in Missouri and when the war broke out he went immediately into the Marines. He went to the 1st Marine division into Guadalcanal. He was in the first wave there. Later on he was transferred into the 1st raider battalion in Guadalcanal. Then he came back to this country. He joined the same division that I did for maybe a month or so. Anyway you were asking about Baton Rouge. There came a time when I was no longer happy running the teletype. I had a captain who was in charge of the officer there. He offered me a staff sergeant rating if I would enlist in the Army Air Force and I could stay right there on the base with a staff sergeant rating and never have to go to war. Well, that didn’t set to well with me either.
RV: Why not?

HP: I figured that was being awful slip shod. If you’re a good American damn it you ought to look for ways to help your country, not to slide out of going to war. It just didn’t fit right with me. I told him I was going to quit and that I was going to join the Marines and he just threw a fit. Anyway I quit. My wife went home to live with her folks. We went back to Topeka and my father-in-law took me to Kansas City to enlist in the Marines. This was September of 1942. I don’t think he thought I could pass the physical. In an hour’s time I passed the physical and was sworn in. He went back to Topeka and I went west to San Diego to the Marine recruiting depot there.

RV: Was it the Marines because of your wife’s brother?

HP: I think so because I didn’t know anything about a Marine. I’d never heard of the damn Marine Corps in my life. I knew there was a branch of service called Marine but I didn’t know anything about them. I think because of the family ties to the Marine Corps was why I went in. It wasn’t what I expected (laughs). I got what I wanted.

RV: So you get to San Diego in September ’42?

HP: Yes, I got to San Diego in September. We were greeted at the gate and the train depot by a Marine sergeant. He lined us all up and wanted to know if we knew our left hand from our right. I think most of us did. We were taken to the Marine Base to be indoctrinated. In those days they had an eight-week course, which we called boot camp. During that eight weeks they were supposed to make Marines out of us. The first thing I think was to break you of all civilian traits and to get you indoctrinated into ideas of killing people. Which of course all your life, you’ve been taught it’s wrong to kill. But now we’ve got to teach you it’s right to kill. We had young men from all walks of life. Probably the oldest fellow there was twenty-three or twenty-four years old. The rest of us were anywhere from fifteen to twenty-one for the most part. In those days most of them were enlisted and not drafted. They had started the draft but when they called them up or draft they normally either went to the Navy or the Army. They didn’t want to enlist in the Marines for some reason. The training at the Marine base was long and different; indoctrination was different from anything that I’d ever been up against. We had a lot of things happen in our history now. One of the first things that I remember is next to us on the east side of the Marine base was an aircraft factory called Consolidated Volte
Aircraft. One time they were testing a bomber and they loaded the thing with sand bags to see how much the plane could lift off the ground. Between Consolidated and the Marine base was about a twenty-foot high chain line fence. This plane came down the runway and just barely cleared the fence and then settled back down. It came down into an area where we had Quonset huts where Marines were going to school, seeing films and learning war tactics by video. The thing plowed into three or four of those buildings. Everything burst into flame. Two other guys and my self were able to climb up on the fuselage of the plane. We got the pilot and co-pilot out of the plane. In the meantime the buildings had fallen in on the Marines. Every kind of vehicle possible was hauling wounded to the hospital. After that we were on a parade ground one day and two planes locked overhead and crashed. Pieces of the plane fell down and one of the pilot’s legs fell right on the parade ground right in front of us. But we had unusual things happen there.

RV: How did you react to this first exposure of death and destruction like that?

HP: I don’t think at that time I gave it any thought. I was worried more about the wounded, getting them somewhere where somebody could take care of them. This was foremost in my mind. The thought of death I don’t think ever really bugged me until we got ready to go into combat. Then I think is when full realization came to me that you could be killed. I think up to that point it just never registered. If it did it wasn’t of any importance. One other thing that happened on the base, they brought in a lot of supplies by train. One day a train backed into the base and it had a long Tom cannon on it. It was on four flat cars. They took it off the flat cars and put it on to trailers. It was so heavy that the wheels on the trailers sunk down in the asphalt clear up to the axles. The breach of that thing was big enough that a six-foot man could crawl inside of that thing and have room to spare. They started to move it and they couldn’t move it. They had to get dozers and put on the thing to pull it. When they got to the main gate at the Marine base they couldn’t get out onto the highway with it. They had to tear the whole west side of the gate out. Couldn’t bend the barrel around it to get it out on the highway. So they had to tear the whole west side of the gate out to get it out on the highway, then it broke the pavement. They were taking the thing out to Point Lloma. Apparently it was to be used
as a disappearing rail gun out there in case we were attacked from the sea. But it was the
biggest canon I had ever seen in my life.

RV: Was there a fear that the Japanese might attack the west coast?
HP: Yes. See, after Pearl Harbor the Japanese made several raids people
probably don’t even know about in two man submarines against the west coast. Several
of the oil facilities were located right down on the beaches. So they’d pop up off the
beach and they’d shoot a torpedo at the thing hoping it would come out of the water,
climb across the sand dunes and hit a tank of oil. We knew they were there and we knew
it was possible. All along the coast they had balloons on cables that they strung up in the
air in case they came in with airplanes that the airplanes would get tangled up in these
cables from the balloons. So yes, there was some fear on the west coast that another
Japanese attack was possible.

RV: Harry, why don’t we take a break right now? It’s now almost eight PM on
December 9, 2003.
Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone. I’m continuing my oral history interview with Mr. Harry Pearce. Today is December 10, 2003. It’s nine AM Central Standard Time. We’re again in Hanover, Kansas in Mr. Pearce’s kitchen in his home. Sir, we’d been talking here before we started recording. You went back to Kansas State. We talked about your freshman year, coming into school and trying to get your priorities in line. You were just describing an academic advisor and what he asked you and what he told you. Could you continue with that?

Harry Pearce: Yes, his name was Professor Sperry. He was a professor emeritus of the department. At that time he was probably in his early sixties. In our discussion he asked me what I’d like to do, whether I’d like to have an inside job or an outside job when I graduated from college. I told him I definitely wanted to be outside. I was a person that enjoyed the outdoors. He wanted to know what I knew about rocks. I told him all I knew about them was when I was sixteen years old my father let me go to work in the rock quarry and I was breaking donnockers with a sixteen-pound sledge hammer so that I was familiar with what limestone was. He asked me if I knew what a fossil was. I told him yes, I told him I’d seen several huge fossils that came out of the limestone rocks in the quarry. He said, ‘Well why don’t you try to take some hours of geology this summer?’ So I let him talk me into it. I took nine hours of geological problems and received nine hours of A out of it, which was my first A subjects in college. That’s what turned me then from there on in my education. I leaned towards geology.

RV: Did it come easy to you? Was it natural to you?

HP: Yes, it came easy to me. In the geological courses we had to have mathematics, which I had very little. I had high school algebra and high school trig, but I’d had no calculus. So I had to retake my algebra and retake trig and retake calculus, which I got through. I had to go back and take my chemistry over again and take my physics over again. With a little math behind me I was able to do both of them. I was not a brilliant student but I managed to graduate and we had an honorary geological society, which I was one of the founding members of. It’s a national society. But my grades were good enough that I was able to get in to that society.
RV: Good you graduated after the war is that correct?
HP: Yes.
RV: Is that correct? What year did you graduate?
HP: Yes, the spring of 1948.
RV: Why don’t we go back to basic training where we left off last night in our discussions? I wonder if you could tell me a little bit about what the Marine Corps was trying to teach you and how they shaped you and what your actual day to day training was like?
HP: I believe that the object of the Marine Corps was to teach you to become a Marine, which meant that you got rid of all your civilian traits. We’re taught all of our lives that religiously it’s wrong to take a life. But when you’re in the Marine Corps you’ve got to forget that. Now it’s suddenly right to take a life because if you don’t take a life somebody’s going to take yours. Under those circumstances I think we began to acquire what the Marine Corps was throwing at you in addition to all of the rifles and the various arms that we had to work with. The Marine Corps wanted every man to learn every other man’s job. For instance if you were trained as a machine gunner and you got shot, and nobody could fire your weapon except the man that got shot, you lost your firepower. So the Marines Corps wanted anybody to be able to pick that machine gun, load it and fire it at the enemy. So our training was complete. We learned the machine guns, we learned the Browning automatic rifles, we learned demolitions, we learned to use the flamethrower, we had experiences with the half-track and light and medium tanks and mortars. You name it and we had experiences in trying to learn each of those fields.
RV: How did you do with those weapons? Did you have one that you were particularly good with or one that you liked?
HP: Well the Marine Corps wanted every man to be an expert if he could be on the rifle. The rifles we were issued at that time are not issued now. It was a model 1903 bolt action, .30 caliber rifle. We went from that then to the Garrand, which was a semi-automatic. Now they’ve gone into automatic weapons which I know nothing about. My field of endeavor for the Marine Corps I started out after boot camp. After boot camp training they sent me to telephone school.
RV: This is after basic training.
HP: They sent me to telephone school. You were given an aptitude test and that’s based upon what your previous education had been would be where your aptitudes are. Not that you were going to go where you thought you ought to go. You went wherever the Marine Corps damn well put you. I was sent to telephone school where you learned to climb a telephone pole and how to rig up a telephone and lay line. After that—

RV: Where was this?

HP: This is still at San Diego at the base depot. It was called the signal battalion. Then after that they put me in radio school where I learned the Morse code and international codes, dot-dash, dot-dash and so on. Then after that I was sent to radar school, which was a continuation more or less of radio school and learning how to operate radar and what the radar screen would show. Many of the men after graduation from boot camp were sent to cooks and bakers’ school, mechanics school, quartermaster’s school, sea school. And the sea schoolboys were the spit and polished boys that served in the embassies. You see them on television wearing their dress blues. When the president lights in his airplane there’s always a Marine standing there to give him a snappy salute. They served aboard the carriers and heavy cruisers and battlewagons. The rest of us that didn’t make any of the schools went into what was known as the fleet Marine Force. The fleet Marine Force was composed of Marines that were going to go directly into combat. So they got more combat training and were sent into combat.

RV: Let me ask you a couple of questions about your actual training at boot camp. Your trainers, the DI’s, were they veterans already from the war?

HP: Yes.

RV: Did they talk to you about their experiences?

HP: No, their job was one thing. That was to teach you the best they could to protect yourself. So we wouldn’t get killed in combat. We had schools, of all types. We had all sorts of training that you can think of to prepare us for what was coming but in so far as they’re telling us of their experiences, no. We knew by their rank that they were veterans of a previous war. That would have been the Guadalcanal and the Salomon Islands.

RV: What was discipline like in the Marine Corps?
HP: The discipline in the Marine Corps was absolute. We used to laugh about it. We used to say there was a right way, a wrong way and the Marine Corps way. You did it only the Marine Corps way. Any variance of that caused problems. One of the things that I think most of the young men did was calling a rifle a gun. The Marine Corps said, ‘No they’re not a gun. It’s a rifle. In order for you to remember that everybody in the Quonset hut will strip down to their skivvies and they’ll put their rifles at right shoulder arms and we’ll walk in a circle. We’ll carry our rifle at right shoulder arm and with our left hand we will point to our private parts. We’ll say, “This is my rifle, this is my gun. My rifle is for killing, my gun is for fun.”’ This may take place for over an hour but you remembered that it was going to be a rifle.

RV: You had to do that?

HP: Yes. If you dropped your rifle you would take that rifle apart and put it in bed with you at night. Take it down to every part and sleep with all that metal around you every night until you remembered not to drop your rifle. If you were caught with your hands in your pockets you filled your pockets full of rocks and you left them there. You jumped on them, you fell on them, you rolled on them and got bruised from them. But you remembered not to put your hands in your pockets anymore. So we had some pretty severe training for those who had short memories.

RV: How did you do with that military lifestyle?

HP: I came out of boot camp as the leader of the platoon that I was in. In the first place, I was not the biggest guy, but I was almost. At that time I was six-two and I weighed around two hundred and twenty-five pounds. Of course in the Marine Corps training they teach you boxing and they teach you hand-to-hand combat and what have you. They put one man against the other. The drill instructors did this to come out with a platoon leader if you will. On graduation date from boot camp, the commanding officer came down through the ranks. For every ‘platoon leader’ they gave him a medal. They pinned a medal on me, they moved over to the next platoon. Somebody came by and took the medal off of me and took it with them for the next platoon. So apparently they only had one medal for all of the platoons that were graduating. I never got to keep the medal but I did get to see it. It did go on the record book that I was the leader of the platoon.
RV: How did they choose you? What did you do to make yourself stand out?

HP: It's that you exceed in everything they want you to do. In close order drill, you do it the best you can and you get to the point where you can tell others and help others in doing it. In the various courses that we were taking we were given written examinations. On the examination you did the best you could on that. The idea was to excel in whatever. If they wanted you to put the boxing gloves on, you put the gloves on with whomsoever they picked to oppose you. You went at it with the idea that you were going to win. Now they have a pole with like a boxing glove on each end of it. In those days we had just pads. It wasn't much more than a soft pair of gloves that we fought with. Hand-to-hand combat was the same thing. You tried to excel in Judo and J’iu Jitsu. You took on anybody that they set up to oppose you. The idea was to win. This is the way that you became the lead man in your platoon.

RV: So you must have won?

HP: Well I did. Again it’s something that I say all along, whatever the mind can conceive if the will is strong enough, you’ll find a way to do it. When you see people with a limb off, a leg or an arm and the things that they accomplish it sometimes blows your mind. I know a young Marine at Manhattan, Kansas that in Vietnam had two grenades, one in his hand explode and one from the enemy explode at the same time. The result was that it blew both hands off at the wrists. He’s completely blind. He has a metal plate in his head. His body is completely filled with shrapnel and he is now making a living doing ceramics. He can’t see what he’s doing, but I have some of his ceramics here. He just does a beautiful job.

RV: Well, you had an example in your brother Douglas who overcame.

HP: His physical difficulties.

RV: His physical difficulties.

HP: I don’t think it makes any difference who you are. Again I say if the mind can conceive it and the will is strong enough you will find a way of accomplishing what needs to be done. But it starts with the mind and the will.

RV: Speaking of minds and wills, what did you all know of what Adolph Hitler was doing in Germany and what was happening in Europe?
HP: All we knew prior to Word War II was that there was a war going on in Germany that the Jewish people were being persecuted, that Hitler was advancing on all of the countries around him, he was accomplishing all of the things that he set out to do. I think as a young man in my mind I thought it was just a question of time until he started after us, one way or another. Of course the way he started was after our fleet. We were sending shiploads of goods to Russia and we were sending them over to Europe. He was sinking our ships on the Atlantic Ocean. I don’t think that we feared him at all. I think we just put it in the back of our minds that sooner or later we’re going to have to fight him.

RV: What did you think of Franklin Roosevelt as president?

HP: President Roosevelt was a figure. I guess you could say he was a man of his day. I don’t know quite how to say it. In my own mind I’ve had the feeling and I’ve had ever since World War II that he knew we were going to have a war and that he failed for one reason or another to let all of us know that it was coming. The way it worked out, the delay in notifying the U.S. that Japan was going to go to war with us was a freak. It wasn’t his doing and it really wasn’t the Japanese ambassador’s doing. It was just something the way it worked out. They had a message to deliver to the United States government (phone rings).

RV: Okay sir, we were talking about Franklin Roosevelt and your opinion of him and the oncoming war.

HP: Hindsight is always better than foresight. There are some things concerning World War II that I’m not convinced has ever been cleared up. Our government has always had a policy of being able to cover its ass when somebody did something wrong. The government can step in and whitewash the thing to where it’s either so confused you can’t find the right from the left but we’re able to cover it up and then in time it’s forgotten. I think the elements that formed right before the attack of Pearl Harbor, our government was putting a lot of pressure on Japan by putting economic pressure to them. I believe in my own mind that Japan had made efforts to patch up their differences with America. Our president at that time I think was in an economic bind. We were being pressured to get into the war with Germany. Things at home here weren’t too rosy as far as work was concerned. I’ve always believed that he knew that Japan had reached its
He knew that Japan had invaded China, Indochina and various sundry other countries and was literally rolling over the world. Germany was rolling over their part. Japan was taking the other part. I think he knew that it was a question of time before we were going to be attacked. Then in later stages, just before the attack they were spotted by radar. They were notified in Honolulu that the planes were on the way. For some unknown reason all of our aircraft on Hicam Field were piled out in the middle in plain sight. All of our large ships except for the flat tops were lined up like sitting ducks in Pearl Harbor. When they knew that the Japs were coming they proceeded to ignore it. Admiral, I believe his name was Admiral Kimmel, he was the fall guy. I will always think than Roosevelt knew more about it than has ever been admitted.

RV: So when you finished your schooling, your basic and then your telephone, radio and radar school did you know that you were going to go overseas or was your station going to be here a domestic assignment?

HP: No, I was transferred into the fleet Marine Force to Camp Pendleton. We were the first group to move into new Camp Pendleton. I went into a replacement depot, which we called a repot depot. Unbeknown to me on the east coast the 23rd regiment, Marine regiment was being formed. It was being formed from men from Guadalcanal and Salomon Islands returning and new Marines right out of East Coast Paris Island boot camp. As the 23rd filled up, they split it in half and formed the 24th. As the 24th filled up they split in half and formed the 25th. The Marines were being pressured at that time to get into combat and start taking some land back from Japan because Japan was running over everybody in the South Pacific. The feel was that it was a matter of time before they went after Australia and New Zealand. We had troops out there but they were in various sundry places and not enough of them to do any good. They were being moved around from New Caledonia to New Zealand and back to New Caledonia again. They weren’t in combat. So they took the 23rd and the 24th and the 25th and moved them to the west coast. Half of them went by rail across the United States and the other half went by boat through the Panama Canal. They arrived on the west coast and were immediately a new division called the 4th Marine division. It was at this time that I was taken out of the repot depot and filled in the rest of the ranks with a few west coast Marines to make up the 4th Marine division. Our training then was at Camp Pendleton. At the time I guess
we figured it as about as thorough training as you could get preparatory to going into combat.

RV: Did they tell you you were going to the Pacific?

HP: Well we knew. That was the only place the Marines were was in the Pacific. We had nothing to do with Germany. After our training there, we were assembled in San Diego for shipment overseas on December 31, 1943. We shipped out January 1, 1944. We went aboard a troop carrier ship known as the *U.S.S. Sheraton*. The first time that I’d ever been on a large ship.

RV: Before we go there, tell me what kind of training was it there at Camp Pendleton? What did they put you through? How long did it last?

HP: I joined them in, probably April or May of ’43. We lived in the barracks. Every company had its own barracks. We had our own mess hall. We had our own quartermaster. We trained in the hills of Camp Pendleton, which was on the Santa Margarita Ranch, which was a sheep ranch. In those days there was an old Santa Margarita Ranch house and there was a lake out behind it. There were still sheepherders and sheep in the hills. The Santa Margarita Ranch House was made into a hospital in case anybody got sick, which they did on occasion. The lake was used to train us in rubber boat landings, rubber raft landings I should say. We had many thirty-mile conditioning hikes with marching pack. Instead of having a full pack of clothing what have you, they filled the packs with rocks and we carried rocks on our packs. These training periods were both day and night. We had survivor training where we were gone for a week. We’d have enough meals for three or four days and none for the rest. You attacked somebody else’s company and the guy with the biggest fist got the other guy’s food. They turned out to be free for alls. We learned a lot of things. We had a man in our company that developed a good case of diarrhea. Without toilet paper he grabbed a handful of leaves to wipe his rear end. It ended up that the leaves were poison oak. He was one very sick, sick fellow because it spread all over his entire body. We had fire problems where we had used actual live ammunition. We had a pilot in the Marine Corps called Pappy Boyington who was in charge of what they called a Black Sheep squadron. We trained with him and he would fly that damn plane so damn low to the ground when it went over your head you could feel the prop wash over it. He was flat on the deck.
RV: So he was right there at Pendleton training with you all, close air support.

HP: Yes. And there were times when they used tracer ammunition and set fire. The whole damn base would have to fall out and fight fire. It was interesting there this past fall in fact summer when the fires all broke out in California. They had fires at Camp Pendleton and the Marines I know had to fall out and fight it. But they got theirs out in a hurry. We had one place that we continually would go to that we nicknamed Tilly’s Tit. It was a bare top hill that you could see from the camp, from any place in the camp you could look out and see this point of land. But that was one of our thirty miles spots away from camp.

RV: Who was Tilly?

HP: I don’t know. I don’t have any idea (laughs). That’s where it got its name was Tilly’s Tit. We had a lot of rubber boat training the Pacific Ocean. We had an occasion where we were told that the 1st Marine raiders were returning from Guadalcanal. We were to set up in foxholes and defend California from the 1st Marine raiders when they landed at camp Pendleton. We sat in those damn foxholes for five days and nights and never saw anybody. On the night of the fifth, the Marine that was in the foxhole with me decided there wasn’t going to be any action so we pulled a bunch of sage brushing over the top of the hole and went to sleep. I awakened just at daylight with somebody moving the sagebrush off of me and somebody pointing a bayonet and rifle at my head and said, ‘Bang, bang you’re dead.’ I looked up and it was my brother-in-law who had been in the 1st Marine raiders coming back to the States for the first time with twelve or fifteen other guys. There were twenty thousand in our outfit. Don’t know what the odds would be of us finding each other under those conditions.

RV: That was pure chance.

HP: Yes.

RV: Wow. Did you all talk about his experiences?

HP: Yes.

RV: What did he tell you?

HP: Well, you’ve got to understand Bob had a military background. He had gone to military school as a young kid over in Missouri. Bob wasn’t too talkative, but he had developed a disease, which later on broke out on him, filariasis. The natives called it
moo-moo. It’s a disease carried by the mosquitoes. It attacks the lymph glands of the
body. I have seen natives whose upper arms might be as big around as your waist. I’ve
seen women whose breasts were as big as watermelons that they would set a child on and
the kid would lap its leg around one breast. I’ve seen men whose gonads were so big that
they carried them in a wheel barrel. One foot might be as big as a bushel basket because
of this disease. When Bob came back he didn’t know that he had it, but it developed on
him at a later point in time. Bob was all Marine. Like so many of us he hated the
Japanese with a passion because, not so much that they had taken land away from people
but their mistreatment of all of their prisoners. They would just as soon shoot you, knife
you, kill you as to look at you in the face.

RV: So you all had heard about this treatment.

HP: Yes. So this hatred of the Japanese and he expressed that to me quite
frequently. He was put it a repot depot and came into the 4th Marine division for about a
month. Then he began to get ill from this filariasis and then he was taken out of the 4th.
During that time he received his overseas pay, it was four or five hundred bucks that he
got. He and a friend of his and a friend of mine, the four of us went on liberty. In those
days, right opposite the main gate, which is not where, it is now, there was a café called
the M&M Cafè. So we went to this cafè and he paid all the bills. We sat down the four
of us and ate two steak dinners a piece and we’d had a few drinks before we had dinner.
When we were through Bob said, ‘I want some champagne.’ So the girl brought out two
small bottles of champagne and each small bottle would make about two small glasses.
Well that was gone in no time. The waitress said, ‘If you’re going to drink champagne,
drink it by the magnum. It’s cheaper.’ So she brought four magnum bottles of
champagne and we drank that. Then she brought four more and we drank that and the
evening went that way. Finally at midnight the guy that owned the cafè wanted to close
up. He didn’t have a restroom inside. The fellow with Bob was about six foot six and
weighing about two hundred and eighty pounds. He went into this outhouse to relieve
himself. When he closed the door there was a wood latch that fell down and locked him
in. It was dark in there and he could see how to get out. The next thing the shit house
just exploded. He tore the sides, the top and everything else. It just laid flat on the
ground when he came out. We started walking to town and on the way we were each
carrying two bottles of Magnum champagne. We were really going to hang one on. We had to relieve ourselves. We came to a house that had a steel picket fence around it with little pointed barbs at the top of the steel. We were leaning on this fence and relieving ourselves though the fence when the damn fence broke. All four of us went down on the ground. We broke all of our bottles of champagne. When we finally got to town they had a place where the liberty buses from Camp Pendleton would pick the Marines up and take them back to Camp. So we got on this bus and started back. Somewhere en route I got ill. We were sitting in the back of the bus and I got ill. I just raised up the window and heaved out the window. Apparently it blew back against the bus and when we came through the gate one of the guards drug his hand along the side of the bus and I guess he got into it. He came aboard the bus and said, ‘Somebody on this bus is sick.’ He walked back to where the four of us were sitting. He looked at me and said, ‘Are you sick?’ I said, ‘No I was never sick a day in my life.’ He said, ‘Well somebody’s sick.’ He said, ‘Nobody’s leaving this bus until the guy that’s sick admits it and he’s going to stay and clean this bus up.’ Well it was a pretty good predicament at that point. Well my brother-in-law Bob said, ‘I’ll tell you what I’m going to do, I will go up to the front of the bus.’ He said, ‘Nobody’s going to get off this bus until the four of us are released.’ So we went up to the front and the guard said, ‘You can’t do this.’ Bob said, ‘You watch it, fellow. I’ll throw you right through this side of the bus.’ Well I knew there were problems coming. So I put my hand over my mouth and when the bus stopped I went up to the front. The guard said, ‘What do you want?’ I said, ‘I’ve got to vomit.’ He said, ‘Well get off the bus.’ He opened the door and the four of us got out. We were four miles from the area where our camp was. We had to walk it after midnight in the fog, four miles. The next morning the company commander announced we were having a thirty-mile conditioning hike. Before we ever got out of the campgrounds I had finished off my canteen of water and I was drunk all over again. I made that thirty miles no problems (laughs). I was high all the way. But we had some good times there on the base. We worked real hard. We went out into the ocean and made rubber boat landings and turned rubber boats over in the surf trying to get them to shore. We had amphibious tractor landings. The early landings were made in what was called a Higgins boat, a flat bottom boat. In order to get out of the thing you had to grab the life line on the gunnel
and throw your left leg or your right leg over depending on which side you were on,
swing out and over and drop down on the outside. That was fine if you were on the
beach. But if the boat got hung up on a sand bar you may drop off into twenty foot of
water. Of course you had a full pack and a rifle and whatever you were carrying, which
means you had to get to shore the best way you could. Then they came out with
amphibious tractor, which was no more than a bathtub with caterpillar tread on it. It sat
very low in the water. Those you had to do the same as you did on the Higgins boat, the
early ones. You had to swing out over the side and drop down. You had about a ten-foot
drop on the outside. They would take you up on the beach and then you would bail out of
this thing and find cover. Later on the amphibious tractors, the later models had a ramp
on the back. That ramp could be let down and you could walk out the back end of it
without exposing yourself to fire from the front. So they did make improvements on
them. But the undercarriage of the thing was like the soft belly. The top portion in the
front was bulletproof steel but the belly of the damn thing, the bathtub part of it was soft.
You could punch a hole in it with a .30 caliber rifle. The biggest problem was getting
hung up on coral reefs. They would belly up and the tread would just sit there and spin or
you got your tread hung up in the coral and threw your tread off. Then you just sat there
and went in a circle. If that happened to you on a landing you were duck bait for the
enemy. They’re site in on you with both artillery and mortars and get right after you. So
we had a lot of things that we had to learn there. We leaned to work not only as a
company but we learned to work as a battalion and we learned to work as a regiment and
as a division.

RV: How did you do that?

HP: Well, the problems were set out for us to do. We had company problems.
One platoon would go hide, the other two platoons would come find it. One company
would go hide and the other two companies would go find it. One battalion would go
hide and the entire regiment would come for them. So we had these sorts of problems.
We also had liberties (phone rings). The Marines got liberty and most of them did not go
to San Diego because it was full of servicemen anyway. We had Army Air Force and a
lot of Navy boys in San Diego. So most of the guys went up the coast. One of the places
was Los Angeles. In Los Angeles they would normally head for Hollywood. At
Hollywood they had a large USO where the stars and the starlets would come and offer free sandwiches and donuts to the guys and entertain them. It was possible to hitchhike up there with fifty cents or a dollar in your pocket. That doesn’t sound like much money but we were only getting twenty-five dollars a month for our service. You could go up there with fifty cents in your pocket. You could go to USO and eat free sandwiches and have coffee and donuts and be entertained on a Sunday or Saturday night, spend the night and go to a hotel and go up in the mezzanine. We’d take the over stuff seated chairs and we’d lay them down on the back and we’d take our jackets off and make a pillow out of them and lay with your head on the back of the chair and sleep on the floor all night. You were in out of the weather and then about six o’clock the porters would come by, wake you up. You’d go to the bathroom and they’d give you a razor and a new toothbrush and some toothpaste and some shaving cream and you could clean up and get ready for Sunday. Sunday night was a mad house as everybody was trying to get back to the base. They had one train that left on Olvera Street in Los Angeles. It went south to San Diego it carried all the servicemen. When that trained pulled out there was no room period. All the chairs were full. The intersection between cars was full. The bathrooms were fall. No room to stand even in the aisles because of the number of servicemen going back. I don’t know, it seemed to me it was a dollar or a dollar and a quarter or something like that to get back. If you didn’t have a dollar and a quarter which meant you had to leave Sunday early enough in order to get back to camp. We had a thing that occurred in Los Angeles with a bunch of young Mexicans, Spanish. We called them ‘Patchuka.’ Another name that was applied to them was ‘Zoot Suitor.’ The Patchukas wore their hair long and pulled back in the back in a clip, with a ducktail. They wore a large bar brimmed hat. They wore a coat with padded shoulders and pulled in at the hips and trousers that were pleated and slim cuffs to where you couldn’t hardly get your foot out the bottom of the trouser leg. A large gold chain with a knife hanging on the end of it. For some reason they took a dislike to the service people. Ten or fifteen of these Patchukas would gang up on two or three service men. Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force whatever, drag them in the alley beat the hell out of them, take what little money or jewelry that they had, their watches and rings and leave them. Quite frankly this went over like a turd in a punch bowl with the men in service. They got bolder and bolder and
bolder. Finally they came down to San Diego one weekend. They turned cars upside
down. They went out to a place called La Jolla Beach where some of the Navy service
men had rented cottages for their wives and families. They pulled the furniture out of the
houses along the boardwalk, piled it up and burned it. They raped the women and they
kicked the shit out of the little kids. This just didn’t go period. We had a full-scale war
going before you could shake a stick at them. Our marine general of the 4th Marine
division called the mayor up in Los Angeles and said, ‘This shit’s got to stop.’ He said,
‘I don’t want you damn Marines in Los Angeles. They’re nothing but trouble. I don’t
want the Air Force here. I don’t want the Army here. I don’t want the Navy up here. All
of you get the hell out and stay out.’ Our Marine general said, ‘We’re coming and you’re
not going to like what we’re going to do.’ So they put together a battalion of volunteers.
We sailed up the coast and we came ashore at Van Nyse.

RV: Were you one of them?

HP: I was one of them. We came ashore at Van Nyse, the first waves to land
were Marines with dogs and billy clubs. The second wave to land were marines with
rifles and automatic weapons. The third was light tanks. We went from Van Nyse all the
way down to Olvera Street. We found the Pachukas down near Olvera. We stacked them
up six and eight feet high. We said, ‘That’s going to be the end of the Pachukas.’ We
beat the living hell out of them.

RV: What did you do? Were you armed or were you with the dogs?

HP: I had a weapon.

RV: You had a weapon?

HP: I had a rifle.

RV: How did you all round them all up? Just encircled the block where they
were and moved in and grabbed them?

HP: Yes, we just moved through them like a wave coming to shore. We thought
that was the end of it. In a weeks time they regrouped. They came down to San Diego.
They roped off a four-block area. They broke the windows out of all the stores. They
turned all the cars upside down to set fire to them. Any civilians or service men they
could find they just beat the living hell out of them. You couldn’t find a serviceman in
town. An Army boy stepped out of a hotel and blew a whistle. Probably twenty
thousand service men fell out from the gutters, behind buildings what have you. They went down to this four-block area. And they beat the living hell out of them so it was the end of the Pachuka uprising.

RV: That ended it?

HP: That ended it. They had no more of it after that. At the same time in Chicago they were having black riots. The blacks were rioting against the Navy up there. So the Navy had their hands full with riots up there. Our training then at Camp Pendleton was drawn to a close. We could see that things were beginning to happen. So on December 31 we got our marching orders. We all loaded our packs up and were taken down to San Diego. Being New Year’s Eve guys wanted liberty. Our company commander said, after we were aboard ship, ‘I’m going to give the company liberty but every company has to have their own shore patrol because we want every man back aboard boat when we sail at six in the morning.’ Well I was one of the ones who got put on shore patrol. We had a jeep and five guys and we just went from bar to bar looking for Marines out of our company hoping that they weren’t too drunk. If they were, we grabbed a hold of them and took them back to the ship. But every bar we went into we got free drinks. Fortunately at six o’clock when we sailed all the Marines were back aboard ship. Not just our company but the rest of them were, too.

RV: Let me ask you Harry, what was Los Angeles and Hollywood like when y’all would take a liberty, beside the Pachuka problem? What was that like there in the forties?

HP: Normally we had no method of transportation to get there so we had to hitchhike. The people driving were civilians. We’d hitchhike and get a ride with a civilian. Really I don’t like to talk about this because it’s as sensitive thing in California. There are so many gays in California. You just can’t imagine. We called them ‘queer.’ I would say two out of every three that we met were queer. If you hitchhiked a guy driving a car nine times out of ten was a damn queer. If you went in the bar, the guy sitting in the bars were gays. If you went to the city park there were all sorts of kooks walking in the city parks. There were guys with sheets on and signs hanging on their backs, ‘Jesus will save. Jesus is coming. Get ready. The end of the world is here.’ And people up on apple crates just blaring so far out that you couldn’t even understand what they were
saying. I don’t know, I guess in all services we just didn’t go for this gay lifestyle. When
I was in the signal battalion we had a man by the name of Sergeant Mallener. Sergeant
Mallener was a China Marine. He had been in China and had earned quite a name for
himself on Yangtze River. They were horse Marines. They rode horseback. He was a
big man and he was in charge of the recruits coming in to the signal battalion. He always
addressed them a day a new class reported. We’d set up a loud speaker for him, a public
address system, put he didn’t need it. You could hear his voice all over that base. As I
said he was a big man and he chewed snuff. Snuff would run out of the corners of his
mouth and drip off his chin on to his starched khaki shirt. He would address this group
and he’d say, ‘Welcome to the signal battalion. I want you to know there are five people
in this world that I don’t want in my Marine Corps. And that is, not necessarily in this
order. I don’t want a thief. I don’t want a liar. I don’t want a coward. I don’t want a
crumb. I damn sure don’t want a cocksucker. If you’re any one of these five things you
ger the hell out of my Marine Corps right now.’ That was his initial address to every unit.
I think we had a dislike for the unusual gay mannerism. I can remember going on liberty
to Los Angeles and we hitchhiked up and we got out at Pershing Square which was
downtown Los Angeles. Pershing Square was just one square block where all these
kooks hung out. We would radiate out from Pershing Square. I know going up one
block there was a bar in every block. One was the 222 Club. One was the 333 Club.
One was the 444 Club and so on. You could go right down the block hitting these bars
and they were full of gays. In a matter of a couple hours you could be so staggering
drunk you couldn’t stand up because these guys all bought you drinks. There was always
fights going on. Because the first time one of them laid his hand on a Marine that was it,
the fistfight started. I used to go up there with a guy that had worked in the Pennsylvania
Coal Fields. He stood about six-six, six-seven, weighed about two-eighty and his ears
looked like cauliflowers. His neck started right below his ears and went out to the point
of his shoulders. He was just all muscle and loved to fight. We got off out of a car one
day in Pershing Square and we both had to relieve ourselves. They had underground
restrooms. We went down in the restroom and I was standing at the urinal and when my
buddy went into one of the units where there was a toilet stool. I heard him mumbling I
heard him shout. Then I heard the toilet flush. I turned around to see what was going on
and this gay had grabbed him by the private parts. He had picked the gay up by the
crotch and the back of his coat, stuck his head in the toilet and flushed the toilet on him
and was holding him there. We later went to making these bars. I don’t know I think it
was the 333 Club we got into. He and I were sitting at the bar and there was a guy sitting
next to him. He reached over and put his hand on Big Boy’s leg. I saw this guy’s body
go clear over the bar. The fight was on. Another time, I went up there and on the way up
the driver of the car decide he was going to make an approach. When we got to Los
Angeles I got out and the Marine said, ‘I think I’ll take a little ride with this fellow.’ He
came back in about a half hour and had the man’s car and his wallet. Apparently they
pulled into an alley some place and the gay made a pass at him. He knocked the living
daylights out of the gay, took his wallet and his car, left him laying in a trash can back
there. It was all part of the life and time at that time.

RV: Did you fight?
HP: Did I fight?
RV: Yes.
HP: Where?
RV: In Los Angeles or wherever in these bars?
HP: Yes, hell yes. Another time we were out in Hollywood and went into a bar.
The bar had a sunken dance floor, by that I mean it was at a lower elevation then where
you came in. There were rows of booths hemispherical like a horseshoe above and
looking down on the dance floor. There was place for a small dance band to play.
Behind each booth if you will, was glass cages. In each glass cage was a different breed
of bird. There were red birds, cardinals. There were canaries. There were blue birds.
There were parakeets, cockatiels, cockatoos, something different in every one of these
things. This fellow that I was on liberty with figured out that they had to get into cages
somewhere. He found a door in behind them. So he went around in behind while the
band was playing and opened up all the doors. Inside of twenty minutes here were
hundreds of birds flying all over that bar. Another time we went into a bar, sat down at
the bar and ordered a drink. We sat there, we sat there, didn’t get a drink, didn’t get a
drink, didn’t get a drink. I finally asked the bartender, ‘What’s it take to get a drink?’
‘We’ll get to you in a minute.’ I looked out over the group that was sitting there and
they were all women. I didn’t see man in the bunch. The guys waiting tables were
tweaking the girls on the boobs and kissing them on the neck and we still didn’t get
anything. I finally got a hold of one of the bartenders and I said, ‘I want a drink and I
want the damn thing now.’ He said, ‘We’ll get to you in a little bit.’ I said, ‘Look you’re
taking care of everybody else in here. Why in the hell can’t we get a drink?’ The woman
sitting down two or three stools came over and said, ‘You fellows don’t know where you
are?’ I said, ‘What do you mean we’re in a bar?’ She said, ‘No, this is a lesbian bar.’
The bartenders were women dressed as men. The waitresses were women dressed as
men. Everybody in there was a gay. Here we were, men in a lesbian place and that’s
why we couldn’t get any service.

RV: Did you get up and leave?

HP: Yes.

RV: What about women? Were there prostitutes in Los Angeles?

HP: Oh, yes. There were prostitutes everywhere. In fact in the Hawaiian Islands
up to the time when the war broke out when they couldn’t travel anymore women in the
United States would go to the Hawaiian Islands in the summer time. They would be
prostitutes all summer long in the Hawaiian Islands. They were out there where mom
and dad and family wasn’t. They would prostitute all summer long and they’d make
enough money to pay for their trip and spend a whole summer in the Hawaiian Islands. It
was quite a thing. The natives all knew about it. That was their lifestyle. Of course I
don’t know how it is now. That’s the way it was then.

RV: So in early January, January 1 you shipped out. Where was your
destination?

HP: We didn’t know it when we shipped out where we were going to be until we
got to sea. I don’t remember. Normally it took anywhere from twenty to thirty days
depending on where you were going. But somewhere en route they broke orders open.
They told us that we were going to the Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands, which
didn’t mean a damn thing to us. Somewhere in my history they didn’t teach you about
Atolls and the Western Pacific. Intelligence portion of the division had from aerial
photographs made up dough, bread dough reconstructed islands so they could show the
relief and they had miniature trees and miniature pill boxes and tank traps and cities and
what have you that would be on the island, sugar cane field and mountains and what have you. We were told we were going to Roi and Namur in the Kwajalein Atoll. The intelligence division had a make up not only showing the two islands Roi and Namur but also the other islands that were in the Atoll. The Kwajalein Atoll was some eighty miles long and sixty miles wide. There were some eight hundred small islands that made up the Atoll. In between the two sides of the Atoll was the lagoon. It was big enough that you could put the entire Pacific fleet and still have room for two or three more just like it in there. Roi and Namur was mandated to Japan after World War I. It had belonged to the Spanish prior to that. After World War I it was mandated to Japan. From the day that Japan took it over until we invaded it. They had never allowed any foreigners in to their territory. So they had thirty years to build up their fortifications without anybody knowing anything about it. There was some speculation at the time that Amelia Aerhardt had disappeared and that maybe, just maybe she would be on one of the islands there, that she had been captured and that the Japanese were holding her prisoner. But of course that never turned out to be. The Japanese fortifications on the island were of such a nature that they knew they would be attacked from the sea, not from the lagoon side. There were five or six entrances into the lagoon that were deep enough that would provide for larger ships to get into the lagoon. On either side of these entrances the Japanese had islands with artillery on them to defend the entrances. So they knew that the attack was going to come from the seaward side. All of their canon and larger guns were placed into position facing seaward. Nothing placed inward toward the lagoon. The 4th Marine division was a portion of the 5th amphibious corps. The 5th amphibious corps was headed up by General Holland M. Smith. His nickname was ‘Howlin’ Mad Smith.’ He had his own way of doing things. There was the Marine Corps way and there was his way. If you were going to get along with him, you were going to do it only his way. Very forceful and a very knowledgeable man. He was under Admiral Nimitz and Sprunce. They had a fast fleet and a slow fleet of ships in those days they were using heavy cruisers, light cruisers, flat tops, converted flat tops and battle wagons, battle ships. Prior to any invasion they would take the aircraft and they would wipe out the Air Force that was on that island or close to it. At least gain control of the air, then the big boys would move in with the big ships. They would blast the island for hours, for days, come
back in a week and do it again to soften up prior to an invasion. They had worked over
Roi and Namur pretty well when we got there.

RV: Harry, before we get there, let me ask you what was that ship like you came
over on the Pacific? What was that cruise like over?

HP: The Sheraton I guess was like so many other troop ships. I don’t remember
now whether there were four or five holds below the top deck. There was very little air
circulation down there. The body stench was something that would make you
regurgitate. Our toilets were called heads aboard ship. I don’t know how many heads
there were on the ship, I never counted them. But I know what they were like. You walk
into the room and there were two rows of seats. One on the left and one on the right.
You could probably get twelve men to a seat. You crapped into a trough. As the ship
would roll to the port side, everything in the trough would move to the left. If the ship
rolled to the starboard side, everything would roll to the right. Periodically there would
be enough water in there that the fecal material would eliminate, go outside the ship and
down into the ocean. So all you had to do was go down there and lose your cookies
because it was something else. The big deal aboard ship of course was to get topside
where you got fresh air. As darkness fell there was no smoking. We had lights out.

Periodically during the day they would have condition red, which was airplanes
approaching, the submarine had been seen or for some reason you went on watch to look
for them. Every morning early, and every night all night you had people on watch.
Normally the ships traveled in single file, one behind the other. Occasionally they would
make a right angle turn and they would all be abreast of each other. But quite few
distance in between them. At night, following another ship where the screws churned the
water and punched the ship ahead, the water was luminescent at night. There were
bacteria [plankton] in the water and when turned upside down they were luminescent.
On one occasion when we were on LSTs, we were probably twelve hundred yards
between LSTs in single file. I was on the forward five-inch gun with a headset talking to
a man in the conning tower. In front of me in the water something came up to the surface
that was elongated like pencil. It had twelve or fifteen arms that were probably twenty
feet in length. This thing went round, these arms went round and round like a pinwheel.
The damn thing rose up out of the water, probably eight or ten feet and then fell back into
the water again. But it was big enough and heavy enough that it made a wave that when
our LST come to us, it raised the LST up out of the water about half way and let it drop. I
called the conner tower and said, ‘Do you see what I see?’ He said, ‘Yes, what is it?’
Neither one of us knew what it was. To this day I don’t know what it was. Some damn
creature out of the depths of the ocean. The *U.S.S. Sheraton* had twenty millimeter and
forty millimeter guns aboard ship. The Marines stood guard during the daytime but
during general quarters the Navy took over. Hell, the Marines knew they were better
shots than the Navy, no question about it. But we never got to shoot the guns.

RV: Were the guns ever fired?
HP: What?
RV: Were the guns ever fired on the way over?
HP: I’m going to tell you about it. We bitched so damn much about it that finally
one time, the Navy said, ‘Okay smart asses, we’re going to let you shoot.’ We were off I
think it was Wake Island or one of the Johnson Islands. They took an A-20 Air Force
plane, it was towing a target. We were in single file. When we got the word we were
supposed to start shooting at the tow target. So the red-hot Marines they let them get on
the guns, five inch, forty millimeter and twenty millimeter. I was on a twenty millimeter.
We were next to the last ship in line. The word came to start shooting. The last ship cut
loose and then our ship cut loose. It didn’t get any father than our ship and the A-20 just
disappeared. Somebody shot the damn A-20 out of the air instead of the target. That was
the last time that the Marines ever were allowed to shoot a gun. Outside of that the big
thing was the chow line. They fed us pretty good aboard the troop ship.

RV: What was the morale like on board?
HP: Everyday you took a turn at topside for exercises. I think the morale was
pretty good as we got closer and closer to our destination. I think the boys began to
worry a little more and sharpen their bayonets and their Kabar knives. They began to
worry, ‘Am I ever going to come back? Am I going to get to go home and see my folks
again? Is this the end of everything?’ I think all those thoughts went through
everybody’s mind.

RV: Is that what you were thinking?
HP: Yes, I’m sure it occurred to me. We’d never been in battle. There were a few guys that had been to Guadalcanal and to the Solomon Islands. They knew what the hell was coming. For the most of us we still hadn’t been shot at, where somebody was trying to kill you. En route we went by the Hawaiian Islands. We didn’t know at the time but the island that we made practice landings on was Maui, which later on turned out to be our rest base. We’d come from combat and we’d come back to Maui Island and regroup and retrain and go again. While there, I got to see my first whale. We were making practice landings in amphibious tractors off the Hawaiian Islands. In order to get from a troop ship in to an amphibious tractor, you had to climb down a rope ladder. These rope ladders were cargo nets about one foot square with an inch and a half diameter rope. Climbing down the thing was bad enough with a rifle and a full pack or a bazooka hanging on you or a demolition charge or a flamethrower hanging on your back. The worst part about it as you got to the bottom this amphibious tractor was along side and a wave would pick that tractor up and lift it maybe eight or ten foot high. Just as you got ready to step into the thing the wave would go down into a valley, drop out from under you, just as fast it could, come back up and break your damn legs. So getting off of a rope leader into a tractor was something that took a little doing. Our landings that we made there were what we call mock landings. We’d go maybe within a couple hundred yards of the beach and then turn around and go back out to sea. The Navy cruisers and destroyers that were assisting us at that time always wanted to fire overhead in what was called a rolling barrage. In the Hawaiian Islands they couldn’t do that because of the population and the people. So we didn’t have the Navy overhead barrage. But to get to the beach, down the rope ladder and get into the tractor, go to the beach, come back, climb up the rope adder, get back aboard ship, this was our training. When we got close to Roi and Namur and the Kwajalein Atoll we were taken off the troop ship and put on an LST. We had been aboard LSTs before. In the LST flat bottom boat, in the hold you had amphibious tractors waiting to take you to shore. So we had to transfer from the liberty ship, if you will, in to the LST. On the first of February 1944, this was supposed to be D-Day for the invasion. The 25th regiment of the 4th Marine division was assigned the duty of taking the islands occupying, the entrances to the lagoon to secure them which would let our ships get into the lagoon. The 23rd and the 24th regiments were to attack the
islands of Roi and Namur. These two islands were connected by a causeway between the two of them. The 23rd regiment was to take the island of Roi where the airport was. The 24th regiment was to take Namur where the troops were billeted. If there was a town, anything you could call a town would have been on Namur. D-Day was started by the 25th Regiment in order to secure the little islands so that we could get the Navy in the lagoon. In reserve was the 27th Army division. The 27th was assigned two small islands eighty miles south in the Atoll to secure. The 23rd on D plus one the second day, at nine o’clock in the morning we hit the island of Roi. Our company, bless its soul was assigned the first wave.

RV: Your company?

HP: Yes. We were a privileged company. In training, in the evenings we had a company problem. We would be out somewhere and the other two companies would come and look for us. Or the battalion would be hiding and the other two battalions would come look for us. Maybe eight or ten of us would build a bonfire and we’d sing in the early evening. Sit around the fire and sing. One night in training some guy threw a handful of blank shells into the fire and they exploded. A piece of metal went into one of the guy’s eyes so they took all of our blank ammunition away from us. They said, ‘From now on it’s “Bang, bang you’re dead.”’ One evening while we were singing the regimental commander, the colonel came into the area and heard us singing. He said, ‘How about you guys singing my song?’ He was from Virginia. Said, ‘Carry me back to old Virginnie.’ Which we did and he sang along with us. Well suddenly every time he was in the field he would come to his company and his company would sing his song. So he adopted us. Because we were adopted we were a privileged company. So every invasion we made we were given the privilege of being in the first wave.

RV: Did you consider that a privilege?

HP: He did. On morning report, ‘How many casualties were in my company?’ We were adopted by this colonel.

RV: For better or for worse?

HP: Hmm?

RV: For better or for worse.
HP: But his morning report the first thing he’d check was to see how many casualties were in his company.

RV: Right.

HP: Anyway Roi-Namur. The island Roi was where the seaplane base was and they had a runway there in a figure four. Then there was a hanger building and several other official other buildings of some sort. Two or three concrete bunkers. Quite a few machine gun positions and artillery positions, anti-aircraft positions. Once the 25th had secured the island for the entrances we brought in the cruiser, the light cruisers and destroyers. From fourteen hundred yards off yards at point blank let them have it from the backside. If you want to destroy something, that’s the fastest way of doing it because all their guns were pointing in the other direction. So they had really nothing but light ammo fired at them. Machine guns and what have you. On the lagoon side of these islands they had taken coconut logs and piled them about nine feet high making a bulwark of these logs. Put sand behind them so it would stand up. When we crawled out of our tractors, we got against these logs to protect ourselves from incoming fire from the airfield (dog barks).

RV: Let’s pause for just a moment.

HP: I don’t even remember where we were.

RV: You were talking about the initial attack into the beach. You were taking fire I assume?

HP: Hmm?

RV: You were taking fire I assume when you came off the landing craft?

HP: We got in behind these coconut logs to protect from incoming fire. What we couldn’t provide for was firepower coming down the beach. If you faced the two islands Roi was on the left and Namur was on the right. The fire we were getting on the left was coming from our right down the beach from automatic machine guns and twenty-millimeter. We had to move out or get shot. A naval shell had broken through these coconut logs where we had landed. There was a depression behind it where the shell had exploded. I moved into this depression where I could see forward. I could see a revetment, probably two hundred and fifty or three hundred yards in front of me with
some fifty-five gallon oil drums. I could see some Japanese moving around in those drums.

RV: Are those the first Japanese that you had ever seen?
HP: Yes.
RV: What were your impressions?
HP: Well they were too far away to get a good close look at them. You just knew there were people.
RV: How were you feeling at this point? Were you just acting on instinct?
HP: Well I was gung ho. I was invincible. Two or three other Marines joined me in this depression. We started concentrating our fire on these oil drums where these Japs were moving around. Suddenly I noticed the sand in front of me was jumping straight up in the air. One of the other boys whistled, ‘You better get your damn head down.’ I said, ‘Why?’ He said, ‘They’re shooting at you.’ That sand that was jumping up in the air was where the shells were hitting. I didn’t even realize it. That changes your complexion. At that point you realize, ‘Somebody’s trying to kill me. I don’t know who he is. I don’t know where he is, but he’s trying to kill me.’ So that changes the whole game. After oh I’m going to say twenty minutes the fire we were receiving quit. The Japs that we saw around the oil drums we didn’t see anymore. We began to move out. Shortly after noon, I had moved maybe two thirds of the way across the airfield and found myself by myself in a shell crater. I was receiving sniper fire from maybe two hundred yards in front of me further away. I was joined by Lieutenant Salome and a Sergeant Kennedy from our company.
RV: What was your rank at this time?
HP: I was a private. The three of us were looking forward deciding on which way we were going to move. We were joined in the crater by a fourth Marine who went down in the bottom of the crater. We were up on the lip of it. He went down in the bottom, took his pack off and took a canister of grenades out. A canister is like a tennis ball can. It contained two grenades, fragmentation grenades.
RV: How large was this crater would you say in diameter?
HP: Probably twenty foot across and eight or ten foot deep. He took this canister out and took the tape off of it. I was looking at him and I saw him turn the canister
upside down to shake the grenades out. Then I looked away. I heard this (slap) pop. I
turned around and I looked back and he had a live grenade in his hand. I’ve never known
if he pulled the pin on the grenade, which I don’t think he did because he had no reason
to. In my own mind I think he had a live grenade that had been put in a canister that way,
without a pin in it.

RV: What was the popping noise?

HP: On a grenade you had a carter key that separated the handle from the cap.
When you pulled that carter key and released the handle, a percussion occurred where the
hammer struck the cap. As soon as the handle flew off the percussion occurred. You had
five seconds from the time the cap was ignited, the fuse was ignited until the damn things
exploded. He had no reason to pull the pin. He had nobody around him to throw it at, to
throw the grenade to. So I think it was a grenade that was live. Somebody Stateside had
put this damn thing in without a carter key in it. Anyway he had a live grenade. Wanting
to get rid of it, he instinctively threw it. He threw it over his back, over his shoulder. But
it didn’t go out of the hole.

RV: Was it thrown with his right hand. Kind of over?

HP: Yes, over his head.

RV: Okay.

HP: It hit up near the rim of the crater and rolled back to him. Knowing that he
only had five seconds he grabbed the grenade and pulled it into his belly and hollered,
‘Oh my God,’ and then the thing exploded.

RV: How far away were you?

HP: He was in the bottom of an eight-foot crater and I was six feet from him on
the rim of the crater, eight feet from him at the most. But he cushioned the entire blew.
The lieutenant jumped clear across this crater from one side to the other in one leap. He
hit on the other side and he started hollering, ‘Oh my legs, my legs, my legs.’ The
sergeant and I went to him and he didn’t have a shell hole in him, he wasn’t bleeding
anyplace. He jumped up and ran to the rear area as hard as he could run. The sergeant
and I went back down in the hole where the Marine was and both hands were gone, part
of his face was gone. His chest was opened up. His belly was opened up. His intestines
were lying out. Part of the thighs of his legs were gone. We put his intestines back in,
poured fresh water on them and that was all we could do. We called for a corpsman who came and gave him morphine shots.

RV: He was alive?

HP: Hmm?

RV: He was alive?

HP: Oh I guess so. He wasn’t able to talk from his nose on down to his chin and his throat that was all gone. But his eyes were still open. But he was sent back to the rear area and he died that day. Now this boy’s name was Richard B. Anderson. He was a PFC and he was in the mortar section. Number one I’ve never understood what he was doing that far forward unless he had come forward to observe the enemy so that he could go back and sight in the mortars in his group. I’ve never known as I said why the live grenade. What he did was way beyond the call of duty. He truly was a hero. He saved my life and he saved the lives of two other guys. As of the end of the war, I was the only individual left alive. The lieutenant and the sergeant both lost their lives in future operations. After that the sergeant and I moved across on the island where other guys joined us and the island of Roi was secured, called secured. When things are secured that takes the pressure off of you. You say, ‘If there’s any enemy he’s hiding. I don’t know where he is but it’s safe to walk around.’ The Marines are souvenir hunters. To the victor goes the spoils. There’s an old saying that a Marine squad is five men shooting, five men hooting and five men looting. I walked around to see the different type of weapons that they had.

RV: The Japanese?

HP: The Japanese. How they were emplaced, what damage had been done to them. In walking along the shore all of their weapons were pointed out to sea. They had a weapon, a .37-millimeter mountain gun on caisson wheels. This little gun when fired the damn thing would jump up off the ground maybe a foot high. So to control the jumping, the smart ass Japanese cemented the wheels in place so it couldn’t jump up. Which was beautiful idea. Except now, if the enemy comes from my right I can’t turn my weapons around to shoot them on the right. I can only shoot in one direction. I can raise and lower the muzzle but I can’t control moving it to the left and right anymore. So they outwitted themselves. I was walking along the beach looking at these different gun
emplacements and what have you. Under the runways there was a water revetment. The water that hit the concrete on the runways would drain to a side of the runway which had bars of steel on it that would permit the water to drain off the runway and run down in to this tiling and the tiling was probably five feet in diameter. They got receive an awful lot of rain in the tropical area. The water was carried and dropped out at either end of the runways into the ocean. Where this thing emptied out under the runway there was .37-millimeter mountain gun. Over the barrel of the .37-millimeter was a dead Jap with his pants down and his underwear down. Drooped over him dead was another Jap with his pants down with a condom on. Both of them got killed in the act of lovemaking.

RV: Really?

HP: By artillery I guess. I was souvenir hunting along with the others and I moved back across the airport to the revetment that had the fifty-five gallon drums. There were seven dead Japs there. Three of them had committed Hari-kari. What they did was they took their rifles and put the muzzle of the rifle to their forehead between their eyes, took off their rotten tennis shoes and put their big toe in the trigger, pulled the trigger which killed them instantly. The other four had been shot. One of them had a samurai sword, which I captured and I still have to this day. You’ve seen it. Where these drums were there was an underground revetment that nobody had gone in there to see if there were any Japs. I decide on my own that I would go down and take a look. I went down in this thing and there was nobody in there but it was a supply dump for the Air Force. There were tires, inner tubes, various sundry instruments and patching and all sort of stuff in there. Boxes, and boxes, and boxes. I climbed up on the shelf to see what was in some of these boxes and one of them fell off on the floor and what looked like an inner tube spilled out on the floor. I turned around to look at it and the more I looked at it I realized it wasn’t an inner tube. It was black rubber like you would put in an inner tube but it had the figure of a person. Well they had a bicycle pump in there so I pumped this damn thing up and what it was the figure of a woman laying on her back with her arms curved and her legs drawn up. With all the attributes a feminine figure would have. I’ve never figured out what part of an airplane that was for. After the battle was over and the Marines were bathing in the surf they got a bunch of these things and I saw the Marines riding on them like water wings.
RV: In the waves?

HP: Yes.

RV: So the Japanese had inflatable dolls?

HP: Yes. In one corner of the room there were several hundreds of boxes, like shoeboxes. I opened one of these boxes and it was full of condoms. Now there were no natives on the island. The natives had all been removed years ago and moved down the island chain, miles away because they didn’t want anybody on their island, no foreigners. There were no women there. Why would you want millions and millions and millions of condoms? I had no idea. I made a mental note that there were millions of them. By evening what few prisoners, I don’t know there were maybe fifteen or twenty prisoners taken on Roi. On the Namur the 29th regiment was having one hell of a firefight over there. During the day a shell went into an ammunition dump and that thing went off and shook the whole damn island. We thought it was going to fall off into the ocean. They were having one hell of fire fight with the Japs over there. By evening they reorganized the 23rd. They set us up in defensive position in case the Japs left Namur and came across the causeway back onto Roi. The company that I was in we set up by the causeway. The causeway was over a depression. At high tide the water came in under the causeway and almost separated the two islands by ocean water. We were set up facing the depression and the causeway was to our left. We were facing Namur. Behind the foxhole we were in was an empty piece of tiling which was one of the revetments coming out from underneath the runway where the excess was carried off to be dumped in the ocean. We were so thick with people, we had four Marines to a foxhole that first night. The idea being that two men were awake for two hours while two men slept. At the end of two hours the two asleep were awakened and they would stand guard for two hours while the other two slept for two hours. This alternation went on every night. There was always somebody awake. Sometime during that first night I was on watch in the foxhole I was in and I heard a metal noise, a scraping noise of metal. So I woke the other two guys up and the four of us were sitting there listening. We couldn’t determine what it was and we weren’t certain from where it was coming but we heard it. We didn’t know what it was. So the four of us stayed awake then the rest of the night. Come daylight we found out what it was. The four guys in the foxhole to our left, went to sleep
all four of them. The Japs that were inside this revetment had crawled out of the tiling and we heard their buttons scarping on the metal tiling. They crawled out and cut the throats of all four of those Marines that were in the next foxhole to us and then crawled back in. We could see their tracks where they came out. The Japanese wore a tennis shoe I guess you’d call it. They were all made alike with the big toe separated from the other four toes. Then a band that went around their leg to hold the shoe on. So wherever they walked you saw the big toe print and the other four-toe print and it was separated and you could recognize a Jap print in the sand or mud or whatever. We could see these things coming from the revetment and going back to the revetment. So that meant that they were back in there. Being in demolitions I ordered a truckload of Bangalore torpedoes. A Bangalore torpedo was a piece of metal two and one eighth inch in diameter and five feet long filled with trinitrotoluene, solid form or TNT. These five foot joints could be interlocked, one interlocked into the next one. Then that one interlocked into the next one. We started putting these sticks together. We got to the point where we couldn’t shove anymore of them in this revetment. So I got a tank, a medium tank and we started pushing these section through until we got them clear through the full length of the runway and out the other side where I had observed the thirty-seven millimeter canon. Then I set this damn thing off. It opened the full length of the runway. There were seven hundred dead Japs in this revetment. We thought we had killed them all.

RV: They were all hiding under the runway.

HP: All in that thing waiting their turn to come out. It was a sight to see, I’ll tell you.

RV: Harry let me ask you a couple of questions. You had just experienced your first combat ever. How did that feel, that first day?

HP: You mean how do you feel? How do you mean towards death or towards battle?

RV: Both.

HP: I don’t think I had much feeling toward the battle. To me it was something that you had to do. You did that for your own protection. ‘I kill you, you’re going to kill me.’ It’s just something you’ve got to do. I never thought about that. But after, after you’ve killed somebody this then is the mental shock. You look then and you say, ‘I
don’t know him. I never saw him before. I don’t know his name. He doesn’t know mine. He was trying to kill me. I killed him. But a few minutes ago he was a living, breathing individual. Now he’s no more.’ I think that this probably registers on the mind more than anything else, the realization that you have now taken a life. Some of the men would vomit it upset them so. Others would go quiet and wouldn’t talk for while. Some would cry. It affected different people different ways because mentally each person is different. We all have the same minds, but they don’t react the same.

RV: How did you feel?

HP: I think in the beginning there was remorse that I had taken a life. I was accustomed to shooting game, squirrels and rabbits and what have you (coughs). Excuse me. At first I think there was remorse. But as time went on and as the battles became more frequent on other islands, it got like shooting a rat or shooting a rabbit. I though no more about it than you would shooting a tin can. I had seen so much death and so much destruction and so much misery, so much torture by the Japanese of the American people and their own natives. I had no respect for them, none whatsoever. I reasoned that the only good Jap was a dead Jap. We hear this in American history and the early west when the cowboys reasoned that the only good Indian was a dead Indian. I guess as you get worn down and you get hardened it becomes easier. To me as I look back on it now.

RV: Okay go ahead.

HP: I don’t remember where I was.

RV: You were talking about over time getting used to killing the Japanese that you did not respect anymore. Then you talked about the cowboys coming west and the only good Indian was a dead Indian.

HP: For fear of repeating myself I think that we reached a point where we just didn’t care anymore. Life became very cheap and yours became very precious. Those of your fellow Marines became as precious as your own. Although when you took a prisoner you had to feed him, doctor him and care for him. If you took no prisoners you didn’t have that added worry, which so contrary I guess to the Geneva Convention. That was the least of our worries, the Geneva Convention.

RV: So what are you saying? When you would come across a Japanese that you could have taken prisoner, you made sure you didn’t?
HP: You didn’t. You didn’t. Now we separated mentally the Japanese from the civilians and the Japanese from the forced Korean or Chosen Labors as they were called. Those people we felt sorry for and those we cared for. For the Japanese soldiers, not the Japanese civilians. The Japanese soldiers we had no respect. We knew that if the shoe was on the other foot, they would have tortured and killed us in an instant.

RV: So you all just shot them?

HP: Yes. Talking about Namur and the firefight that the 24th regiment was having. They finally secured on the second day Namur. It was the barracks where the Japanese lived, ate and in the mean time, the 27th Army division had a beach head fifty feet wide and that was it. They had not secured their island. General Holland M. Smith, ‘Howlin’ Mad’ as the Army called him was slightly pissed that a division of Army could not take two little islands. So he took the 25th regiment which had secured the little islands into where the openings were and set them down to relieve the Army. In two hours time the 25th regiment had secured both islands. As I said the general, Marine general was slightly pissed. At a later point in time he relieved the commanding general of the 27th Army of his duties on Saipan and he was sent back the Hawaiian Islands. I’ll cover that when we get to Saipan. When the island was secured it was a hell of a mess everyplace. The trees were all shredded. The buildings were completely destroyed. There was a lot of death and dead that need to be buried. A lot of dozer work had to be done to make the place livable again. The Marines went down in the island chain and brought back the natives to help clean up the work. Being a degenerate, I developed a good idea. At the time I thought it was. I got with some of these natives, a couple other Marines and I. We told the natives that the Army was going to come in and secure the islands and would occupy them. They would be taken care of as civilians from now on. They needed to greet the Army in a fashion that the Army would become accustomed to and could remember. So we went over and we got boxes and boxes and boxes of condoms and we had the natives blow them up, tie a knot in the end of them and when the Army came ashore to occupy the islands the natives waved all these condoms and turned them loose in the breeze and let them blow across the island. While on the island, the first day I went back to the beach to get ammunition. There was an LST on the beach, a ramp down and the bow doors open. There was a coffee table setting up in the
sand with a coffee pot and paper cups with coffee. A man standing there handing out
coffee with a Salvation Army uniform on. I have never known whether he was really a
Salvation Army man or whether he was some Navy guy that had the uniform and put it
on. I say let it be said, ‘That the Salvation Army is everywhere.’

RV: Did you get a cup of coffee?

HP: No. I know that’s what they were doing. They were handing out coffee.
Didn’t have any donuts it was just coffee. There was on the island of Namur right at the
edge of the depression area where the causeway was a Marine was digging a foxhole. He
encountered some straw. He pulled the straw up and there was a wooden box under
there. So he opened the box and it was full of booze. He lifted that box out and there
was another box and another box and another box, and another box and another box and
so on until they had a crater there that was probably a hundred feet across and twelve feet
deep. Marines were carrying booze in every direction. There was imported wines and
scotch whiskey, sake, but no bourbon. We enjoyed it. The beer that they had was Asahi.
It is the best beer that I have ever had in my life. It was absolutely delicious. I know
they’ve got it in this country, but I’ve just never been to a place where I could buy it. It is
delicious beer. A-s-a-h-i. Asahi. After the island was secured, we rowed back aboard
our transport. We went back to the island of Maui, which we found out then was going to
be our rest base. We had to build this rest base for us. It was about fifteen feet above sea
level. Behind us was an extinct volcano. I’m not sure of the pronunciation. Haleakala. I
think was the name of the volcano. I’m not sure how you spell it, but it was some ten
thousand feet high. Clouds were always around the top of the volcano. As morning
progressed, the clouds would lower, come down the sides of the volcano and it rained
every damn day. In the evening it would go back up to the top of the volcano. Our camp
was constructed roughly fifteen hundred feet above sea level on the side of this thing.
There were some minor ravines in the area that had springs in them and separated one
tent area from the other. The entire 4th division was together. The headquarters and
artillery tanks, heavy weapons were on one side of the ravine. On the other side was the
infantry and then the ravine on the other side of them and then the amphibious tractors
were on the other side of them. We were arranged (phone rings).

RV: Ok, go ahead.
HP: The regiments were set up tent wise on an incline with the 25th regiment at the highest elevation, the 23rd in the middle and the 24th at the lowest elevation. Each company had two rows of tents facing each other. There was a company street which had volcanic cinders put down. We had no concrete, we had no limestone. So they used volcanic cinders and put it down on top of the dirt to walk on. Some of these volcanic cinders were as big as basketballs. Some were the size of your fist. To walk down the company street you could turn an ankle real easy on that street.

RV: Right.

HP: For those men that got into trouble, their punishment was to stay in camp all day with a sixteen-pound sledgehammer and break up these basketball sized cinders to get them down to a size you could walk on. At the end of each tent row, roughly a hundred feet beyond the last tent was an outhouse. These outhouses were nine holers. At the other end of the tent row were the office buildings. We had a beer hall and we had a place for the corpsman to take care of daily sick call. You had your company offices, buildings there. They weren’t much more than just shacks. But the tent rows, each tent had a nine-man tent with a concrete floor in it, a center pole with a table around it. This is where we shaved and where we wrote our letters and what have you. To start with we had candles and kerosene lights. At a later point in time we eventually had electricity. One light bulb in each tent. There was one tent in the area, out in the middle that was the company commander’s tent, where every morning he would hold roll call and have office hours and what have you for the men. One half of the island was jungle and got all the rain, three hundred and some inches of rain a year. The other half of the island was almost desert. So the water was taken off of the jungle side and routed round and round the island and taken over onto the desert side. The desert side produced pineapple and sugar cane and a few bananas. The people of the island, there were a few what we called old native Hawaiian families. But basically most of the people were imports of Asian decent, Japanese and Chinese and mixed. I could never look at them and tell you which one was which. The facial features from the side and what have you are the same. The Chinese had a few mannerisms that the Japanese didn’t. Now many of these people were still loyal to Japan. They considered to tell you that they were Americans, but they were still loyal to Japan. On the island there was one or more radio sets that were sending out
radio messages to the Japanese submarines which was being conveyed on back to Japan.
The Army and the Navy and the Air Force and the Marines all tried to find these things.
We would triangulate in on them. By the time we got there they’d be long gone. But we
knew they were there because we picked their signals up. On the island were two
principle towns at that time: Wailuku and Kahului. Kahului had boat docks, piers that
extended out into the ocean. They were owned by the Dole family. The Dole pineapple.
The Dole family home was there. When the war broke out they took off for the main
land and just left everything. They told the government to take it over. The Dole family
house was turned into a hospital. They had I don’t know, eight or ten chicken coops out
behind. These were cleaned out and cardboard sides put in and whitewashed and turned
into barracks for the hospital patients. If you got sick, you went to the hospital you ended
up in the chicken coop. Just beyond the chicken coop were the pineapple fields. They
grew the biggest damn pineapples I’ve ever seen in my life. Some of these were eight,
ten, twelve inches a cross, a foot or foot and a half long. You cut into one of them and
the juice just poured out of them. Oh God, they were delicious. You just don’t see that
stuff here. I don’t know who gets it, but we don’t get it here. I’ll tell you that. There’s
nothing like a fresh Hawaiian pineapple right off the bush. In the two towns, there wasn’t
anything there. A few buildings that were boarded up. There were a few Chinese
families. I could remember seeing a group of Chinese men playing mahjong or
something like that. They had games that they were playing. When you went on liberty
there wasn’t anything to do. There for because the towns were small, there were twenty-
thousand Marines there plus an Army contingency, a Navy contingency, an Air Force
contingency they couldn’t turn them all loose. So we got liberty once every nine weeks.
We had probably eight miles to get to the nearest town from camp. The government
would take us to town when our day of liberty came in a six by six truck and dump us off
but you had to get home the best way you could. Of course there were no taxicabs, no
buses, no anything at that time. You could walk around and look at the coconut trees,
they had asphalt roads, but there wasn’t a damn thing to do. One entrepreneur Chinaman
said, ‘Look here. Here’s twenty thousand men all of them with money in their pocket
and I don’t have any of it.’ So he began to open up the stores. The first thing he opened
up was a store with rag dolls on a rack. You got to throw three balls for a quarter. If you
knocked the rag doll off the rack you didn’t get anything you just spent your quarter. I can remember asking somebody where I could get a hamburger and they had never heard of a hamburger. They didn’t know what one was. But the Chinaman came up with one. It was one part meat and nine parts bread. You could have one if you got there early enough. The other thing was ice cream. He would make a couple of pails of ice cream if you happened to get there early enough you got an ice cream cone. If you didn’t there wasn’t any ice cream. The natives as I said, were a few Hawaiian families and basically the rest were Asian decent of some sort. Most of them worked in the sugar cane fields and in the pineapple fields. Going to and from the jungle side, on forced marches and what have you we would pass these people working in the field. Invariably they would stop work and turn their back on us, which to me was a hell of an insult.

RV: They would deliberately stop, stand up and turn their back?

HP: Yes, yes. They’d have a hoe in their hands and they’d lean on the hoe and turn their back to you. It was quite evident that they were turning their back to you. It wasn’t that you think they were, you could see it. Having been in combat one time and beginning to have a dislike for the Japs I didn’t appreciate this one damn bit and neither did the others. Then we found out that in Japan you never look upon the emperor. He is the sun god. A mark of respect to the emperor was to turn your back on him and not look upon him. When we found this out, then we had to change our whole way of thinking. They were respecting us and not shaming us. We had a lot of things that we had to learn about the Japanese people.

RV: How long were you there?

HP: Huh?

RV: How long were you there in camp?

HP: Let’s see. From February until June the first time.

RV: Right.

HP: Our company problems for the most part were beginning jungle training. Going from where the camp area was we had to walk a portion of the way around the island to get into the jungle. This is where our jungle training took place. I told you about guys throwing the blank shells into the fire and having the blank shells explode and put a boy’s eye out. When they took our blank shells way from us all we could do was
on our problem say, ‘Bang, bang you’re dead.’ On the island there was a little bush, shrub bush that grew. There was fruit that grew on it called a guava, g-u-a-v-a. The guava was about the size of a tomato but it was a lemon color on the outside, with the skin of a lemon. The inside looked like a pink tomato section that had seeds in it. The guavas, you could eat them raw but for the most part they were used to make jelly. The Marines found out that you could smack some guy up against the side of the head with these things and he looked like he’d been hit with a fresh tomato. We were quite an innovative bunch. But when they took the shells away from us we armed ourselves with guavas. We had a company problem where we were back in the jungle and the other two companies were hunting us. There was one path through the jungle and we had our foxholes on either side of this path. The boys had piles and piles of guavas. About one or two in the morning there was a group of men come up the path and somebody hollers ‘halt.’ Somebody in the crowd hollers, ‘Up your ass.’ Somebody on the Marine said, ‘Fire.’ They all cut loose with their guavas. Into our camp came the commanding colonel of the regiment and his staff and they looked like they had been dipped in tomato juice and they were madder than hell over it. Our company CO said, ‘Bang, bang you’re dead.’ We got our blank shells after that.

RV: Did you?

HP: Yes. We had an occasion where we were going to the jungle side. This was a later point in time. We had a new company commander after Tinian. His name was Major Fought.

RV: How do you spell that?

HP: F-o-u-g-h-t. And we were going around to the jungle side for training. A Jap civilian on horseback came running down the path with his horse and reared back on the reins and the horse reared back with his front feet and pawed right at the major’s face. The major reached right up and grabbed the bridle and pulled the horse back down and turned around to one of our interpreters and he said, ‘What’s the matter with this son of a bitch?’ The interpreter talked to the Jap a little bit and he said, ‘Well the Jap is pissed because he had a still and the damn Marines got into his still, drank all of his whiskey and tore his still up and he wants paid for it. He wants you to pay for it.’ The major said, ‘Tell that dizzy son of a bitch to get out of the road.’ Back down the road the Jap went on
his horse and here he came again. He reared back up to the major and the major turned to the interpreter and I said, ‘You tell this crazy bastard if he does that one more time I’m going to blow this horse’s ass right out from under him.’ He told him and the Jap went back down the road. Here he came again, reared the horse up and major pulled his .45 and kaboom shot the horse right out from under him. We all walked by this guy and I could still see him sitting on that damn horse with tears in his eyes. The truth is some Marines probably did find the old boy’s still and probably did drink his whiskey. On that jungle side of the island where they captured the water, the trenches that they dug to handle the water were cemented. There were places where there would be a portion of a hill and they would tunnel through with this water tunnel. On the other side it might drop three or four hundred or a thousand or twelve hundred feet straight down into a plunge pool down below. Where those plunge pools were they were absolutely gorgeous places. My God, the water was just as clear as it could be. There were bananas growing there and different fruits. Just paradise places. But if you got into these trenches where the water was big, the water was swift. If you ever got washed through the damn tunnel and came out the other end you had a hell of a drop into the plunge pool on the other end. The jungle side was typically jungle with limes and all manner of vegetation and what have you and difficult to travel through. As the water was routed down the island, people drank it, they washed in it. Their cattle and a few sheep and hogs drank out of it. Then eventually it was used for irrigation purposes. They bathed in it. As I said the livelihood on the island was basically the pineapple and the sugar cane. Below camp just a short distance was a town by the name of Haiku. They had a sugar cane factory, sugar factory on one side of a ravine. And on the other side was the little town. People, in order to get to the sugar cane factory, had to go back and forth across this narrow gauge trestle bridge. I think in any group you’ve always got two or three assholes that can’t conform. Beside myself there were others that were a lot worse. At Haiku there was one little Chinese store. The Chinaman that ran it had a little canned goods and occasionally would have ice cream. The Marines coming in off liberty, walking in off liberty would go by and they would buy an ice cream cone. Or if they had enough of it they would buy a quart of ice cream and bring it back to camp. Two of the guys out of our company one night, late I the evening came by and the Chinaman was closing up and they wanted ice cream. He
said he didn’t have any. One of them walked around behind the counter and opened the
chest up and there was ice cream in there. So he cursed the Chinaman and left. After
dark the two yo-yos went back up, tore the side out of his building went in and stole all of
his ice cream and just tore the hell out of his building. Of course he complained about it.
Shortly thereafter these same two yo-yos one night went down to this trestle. They
cought a young gal going to work or coming from work and they pulled her down off the
trestle and they raped her. Of course she told her folks and the folks told the local police.
The police came down at four o’clock in the morning, got the general out of bed. He was
mad as hell. He got all the colonels up and they were mad as hell. They got all the
majors and the captains up and they were mad as hell. She and her dad and her mother
and the police what have you went up and down the lines of twenty thousand men
looking them in the face so she could say these are the two that did it. Men were standing
there in their skivvies. Dark, she couldn’t find them. I’ve often wondered if she stopped
in front of me and said, ‘There’s one of them.’ Where would I have been? She couldn’t
identify them. Unfortunately both of these guys were killed at a later point in time.

RV: Did you know who they were at the time?
HP: Yes, yes I knew who they were.

RV: You didn’t know that they had done that though?
HP: No, no. I knew Marines were at fault but I didn’t know the two guys that did
it. I knew the two guys that stole the ice cream because they brought me some of it. I
didn’t realize they were the same two guys until way later on. One of them made an
admission that he was one of them. Our training was intense. For the time and date it
was thorough. We knew we were going to go into combat again. We weren't sure where
but we knew there was always one more island to be taken.

RV: What id you think of that island hopping campaign, the United States
included?
HP: You’ve got to understand the average private PFC, corporal sergeant, etc the
enlisted men have no knowledge of what high echelon is thinking. Our company
commanders, our battalion and regimental or divisional commanders had no idea what
Admiral Spruence, what General McArthur were planning.

RV: General.
HP: What these men are thinking. They’re the ones that plan the battles. We had no idea which island we were going to be taking or where we were going. We just felt that we hadn’t conquered the Japanese yet so there’s got to be more war until somebody gives up. We never knew where it was going to be or the reason behind it. I can remember saying, ‘Who’s brilliant asshole idea was this? Why this thing?’ In May they told us we were going to combat, get our gear ready. We got back aboard ship and we went to Honolulu. We were on the LSTs, loaded for combat. We were going to have a couple of days there, give some of the men liberty. Not all, just a few of them. LSTs were put into what was called West Lock Pearl Harbor. West Locks was on the west side of the harbor area. The LSTs that we were in were tied through the bow and through the stern and anchored to the shoreline and also out in the water. We were tied side by side with roughly two feet between ships. Supplies were being taken aboard. As I said we were loaded for combat and on Sunday May the 21, 1944 a buddy that I had we just had our noon meal. Aboard the LSTs we were carrying piggy back LCIs, which was landing craft infantry. These flat bottom boats had been put up on four by four cells. They were being anchored down to the deck by wire lines. We had men aboard the ships that were welding the wire lines down to the ships so these LCIs could not come off in high water. On the bow of each ship were barrels of high-octane gasoline, some where between seventy and hundred of these on the bow of every boat. They were tied so as they wouldn’t come off in high water. But here were fumes that were coming off of the fifty-five gallon drums. You could smell the gasoline. These men were natives that were doing the welding on the lines holding the LCIs. Sam and I, my buddy we had moved our cots topside under the LCIs so we wouldn’t have to be down in the hold where the body smell was. We’d have fresh air and sleep topside en route. We were sitting on our cots; we couldn’t help but notice a dangerous situation between the welding torches and the sparks that were flying and the high-octane gasoline. Our LST was number sixty-nine and it was next to the last one out in the water, which was LST 353. I had just remarked that it was a good day for sabotage when the ship next to us, 353 blew up. The flames shot several hundred feet right straight up in the air. The concussion blast was horrible. Their bow doors had been opened and their ramp down and they had been loading 4.2-millimeter rockets. No one knows for sure whether somebody dropped a
rocket that started it. Sam and I always figured that it was the sparks off of the welding torch and the high octane fumes because the blast was immediate, it was on top and it went straight up. That’s what makes me think it was the gasoline. The force of that blast, there were men down below in these LSTs. It was Sunday. Some were writing letters, some were shaving some were taking a shower. There were men topside when this blast occurred it just leveled everything. Sam and I were blown off our cots. All we had was our skivvies and our helmets. We each grabbed a helmet and put it on. There was Sergeant Bass lying on the deck, blood coming out of his eyes and his ears and his nose and mouth. We picked Paul up. I told Sam, ‘Let’s move him over to the next LST.’ So I passed his arms through to Sam, got on the next LST and I had his legs and just as Sam got a hold of him our LST 69 blew up, the same way as the other one. When that explosion went off it picked me up and took me clear over the LST that Sam was on. Blew me clear over that onto the fourth LST. I came down on one of the guide wires that was holding a LCI on board. It just folded me in double and I went round and round three or four times and fell on the steel deck on my back only to have Sam reach out and grab me and pull me underneath the LCI. I said, ‘How in the hell did you get here?’ He said, ‘They blew you over the LST and I went under the LCI.’ When the sergeant that we had, I can remember as I went up in the air I saw him hit the water between the two vessels and just disappear, so he was lost.

RV: Did you know him?
HP: Huh?
RV: Did you know him?
HP: Well, he was the sergeant in our company.
RV: In your company.
HP: Paul Bass was his name. I knew him. I have known, the Navy never admitted that this happened for years. They took pictures of it, but they covered their ass on it. I’ve never known what the Marine Corps told the parents and the relatives of those that were lost during this fiasco, whether they reported as Missing in Action or Killed in Action or what or even if they told them. We lost a hundred and fourteen men and as soon as one ship caught on fire, then the next one, then the next one, then the next one, then the next one, then the next one. Sam and I moved over one boat at a time until the one next to us
would blow up. Then we’d move over another one. We finally got to the last boat and it was anchored to shoreline, probably seventy-five or a hundred feet off of the shore. The shore was a mud bank, maybe two foot wide at the bottom and then went up a steep incline, probably fifteen feet. There had been enough men go up that mud back that it was as slippery as a greased eel. As we got to the edge of the boat and looked down at the water, the water was now on fire down around all the boats, oil and gasoline burning. Down below I could see Navy personnel, some with Kopek lifejackets on just bobbing in the water, some without any lifejackets. Their heads were going under and coming back up and they were fanning the water. They didn’t know how to swim. I suppose there were probably two hundred men in the water below us. There were a bunch of Navy men that were hanging on the sides of the LST with their fingers still gripping the edges. This lieutenant in the Navy came along and was stepping on their fingers and making them drop into the water. On the side of each LST we had big, metal donut life rafts. I saw him cut one of those loose and it dropped down on the heads of eight or nine men.

Excuse me, I’m coughing again (coughs).