



Keith Renstrom

United States Marine Corps

Gunnery Sergeant

Pacific Theater

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Interviewer:

Geoffrey Panos

THIS INTERVIEW IS NOT EDITED FOR CONTENT, LANGUAGE OR HISTORICAL ACCURACY

Geoff: Lets just start from the beginning... where are you from?

Keith: I was born in Ogden, Utah but raised in Huntsville, Utah.

Geoff: And your dad was someone special as far as the military.

Keith: My dad was special. He was a marine all of his life so I joined the Marine corps on June 13, 1940 and then when the war came on my brother-in-law joined the Marine corps and was in the fourth marine division, Glenn Harper from Ogden, and then when I was fighting on Iwo Jima my brother Brian, the next one down, joined the Marine corps and had just got out of boot camp when I came back from overseas and was a D.I. on San Diego. During the Korean war, I was called back in and my younger brother then was in the Marine corps, Darrell Renstrom from Huntsman, Utah but he finally ended up marrying a little Kleg girl from north Ogden and then Darrell also ended up in the State Legislature.

Geoff: Your dad had been in WWI?

Keith: My dad was in WWI as a marine.

Geoff: Did he fight in Europe?

Keith: No, he had been on a mission up in Montana, and when he came home from his mission and it was over, the war was on, he stayed in Huntsville and harvested all of the grain and hay and everything for the winter. Then when he got it all in the barn and everything and set up then he went and joined the Marine corps and went down to Palo Alto, California.

Geoff: I just wanted to establish for everybody why it was important. Your father played a big role in you picking the Marine corps

Keith: Oh yes. When my grandfather came over from Sweden, nobody raised a flag in Huntsville and my grandfather was very patriotic and he started to raise the American flag on four different places that the flagpole stood in the park in Huntsville. So when I grew up my dad was raising the flag and my grandfather there and my earliest memories was of walking in snow up to my chest out to this flag pole that was on the backstop of the baseball park, and they had big telephone pole lights standing up there, and I was up there and snow up to my neck and my dad let me pull the flag up and I remember that it was an exciting moment in my life to pull this big flag all the way to the top. My dad use to time it so that he would watch the trees so that as the flag was raised to the top, the sun would hit it, and it was just sort of a tradition that we carried on there so my dad raised the American flag in the town of Huntsville for seventy years. Not every day, but on all of the holidays, whether rain or snow or sleet or wind, whatever it was we raised the flag and it always went up at sun-up, and we always took it down at sun-down. The Marine corps raises the flag at eight o'clock in the morning and the army raises at sun-up and then the marines, they put it away at sun-down and then the tap of the army has what they call a tattoo, and that's when at four o'clock in the afternoon the flag comes down so branches of the service have different things.

Geoff: So why did you pick the marine corp?

Keith: My father was a marine in WWI and he use to give a lot of lectures all of the time and I just felt that they were better than anybody else so I'd watch the army guys in my town of Huntsville there were a lot of army guys that had been killed and the Jesperson boy was one that had been killed over in Germany and Earl Felt and Arnold Berlin and all of the rest of rest of them and Dave Peterson and a lot of the WWI veterans that were there, I'd hear them talk. Well my dad was more interesting to listen to than they were because they didn't understand talking like my dad did. He was an excellent speaker. So we just grew up figuring that the marines was the best so when I got out of high school I didn't know what to do and so forth so I asked my dad if I could join the Marine corps and my mother, she was opposed to it. She said, "No you can't do that, you have to do this and that." My dad didn't say anything and we just talked and finally my mother got around and she said, "Well if you get your patriarchal blessing I will think about it." So I got my patriarchal blessing and finally they decided to let me join the Marine Corps.

My dad and I went to Salt Lake on the Bamberger train and got off and I joined up with the Marine corps and I came back and they told me when to come down and I took my allegiance to the Marine corps and I felt proud of it and I had never left the state of Utah until I was on that train and I was on my way to California. So my first states was Nevada that we came in to, and that was on the train and there was another guy who was just a transit that joined with me, so the two of us went on down to San Diego and he knew what was going on—he'd been around. We got into Los Angeles and changed the train down there and I was amazed at how smooth everything went and we got down to San Diego and the train stops dead end at the Broadway Pier area and we got off and neither one of us knew what to do and they'd asked the conductor and he said, "Well, the Marine corps base is just down here, get on the bus." So we got on the bus for a quarter and they gave us tokens and we rode the bus, and as I got off the bus we started to walk in the gate and we had our papers and so forth and as I walked across the thing I'd never seen lines painted on the ground, and what's suppose to stay in between them and all of that stuff you know, and as I stepped down to walk across the street this loud voice hollered at me, "What are you doing here marine?" And I turned around and he said, "We paint those to keep you walking there to save your lives, now stay between the lines!" That was my introduction to the Marine corps right there. I was just kind of shocked you know and we went on down to where our barracks were going to be and it was too late to get anything to eat so they gave us our sheets and our blanket and the next morning at five o'clock I heard this horrible noise and the lights all came on and for a minute I'd forgotten where I was and there I was in the Marine corps alive and here it went, and so that was the beginning of it. I joined the Marine corps because I felt truly inside of me that I wanted to follow in my dad's footsteps.

Geoff: You rose in rank really fast.

Keith: I'll tell you that was unbelievable. Yes I did. As I got out of boot camp and I had fired my rifle I got a big scar on my leg. A spider bit me, and I scratched it and got infection in it, and so my leg from here to my ankle was just the same size. It was horrible. So the platoon that I was in, Platoon 45 that I have my picture with and so forth, the last week of my rifle training, and before I had to go into another platoon. So they took me down to the naval hospital in San Diego and they didn't know what they were going to do with it. They were afraid that the pressure on my kneecap would move the water out of it and I'd really have some problems. So

they lanced it with just a start like that and then they squeezed up from my ankle and all of the puss came out of my leg. I mean it didn't hurt you know, but I couldn't believe that so much of that goop came out of there. And they kept me there for a week and then I went back out to the rifle range and got in to another platoon, and when we went out on the range to fire (I just had a week), well I made sharpshooter. I was a good shot to start with, so I got out of boot camp and then as we were transferred all over the place, some went to Guam, some went to Wake Island, some went to China, some went all over the place, and I went to the F Company, Second Battalion, Sixth marines out at camp Elliot and at camp Elliot was the beginning of my becoming and marine and I will tell you a little bit about it because this is what started me in my rapid increase in rank, and I'd only been in the Marine corps for six months and we had a firing problem out and I use to gather up all the extra ammunition and I was the B.A.R. man and so I went on the line with every magazine I had full of ammunition instead of half. They use to give you half to save but if you pick it all up that they'd stuff the short rounds and all that kind of stuff you have all kinds of good ammunition and then I put in extra tracer shots so about two shots was a tracer and that was would let you know what you're doing so as we went up to have the firing line on this thing, we'd rehearsed it many times what we'd do in the case of attacking up a draw on the firing line. We got up on the line and they'd have these little targets that would flip up, silhouette targets, they'd give us the firing position and I remember the orders from the corporal, he says, "Range four hundred yards, enemy machine gun by base of left side of tree, commence firing with your BARs." Well my first shots were right in there, the tracer right there. You couldn't ask for a better thing to start with and I had a magazine fail me and I had to take it out and throw it aside and put another magazine in and I had a round that was too long and I dropped that magazine and I did all of the things that I was suppose to do very well and quickly, and as I looked back I could see these "leggings" with the "leggings" just shining, and finally I heard him say, "I can't even see them." And then he would say, "Yes, there they are." The tracers are pointing up the line and I went across and I went up the trail and I did everything that I was suppose to do with it and finally when I turned around, there was Lieutenant Colonel Poindexter was standing over me. He was just standing there with his hands on his knees and he says, "Make that man PFC!" So that is something that just never ever happened in the Marine corps for something like that to happen to a boot that only has six months in. That meant that I didn't have to stand mess duty and when I went on guard duty, I was now a Lance corporal

acting as PFC but acting as a corporal. And the corporal was acting as a sergeant of the guard, you know so we were on duty that way. I really lucked out on that and so then as we finally out orders and came home on Christmas and got our orders to go we got orders to go to Iceland. We didn't know where we were going to go—to Iceland or not—until that came out later. But there I was a PFC so no longer did I have to carry the BAR, I could carry my O3 rifle and everything that we had on us was 1918—our canteens, our mess kits, our helmets, everything was 1918.

Geoff: Tell us about where you were when Pearl Harbor was hit.

Keith: I'm coming to it. This led me to where I was in Pearl Harbor. So we went aboard ship at the foot of Broadway Pier, and then we went down on the coast, down to Panama, and on the way down the decks were so hot that they use to let water run all over the decks to evaporate off so they could keep the inside of the ship cool. We went down to the Panama and there was the old Olympia—the one that Perry used to go to China—was sitting there guarding the canal. That's what they called "cream duty." You got aboard that and you had the best of everything. I was just anchored there and so we went back and forth and back and forth out of the canal and where we finally got the word that we were going to the island of Martinique and take back all of these American planes that the lend-lease had given to France, and then France had fallen and now the Martinique government had given the planes back and we were going to go down and take them back and then they decided that it wasn't worth that so it was for us to move on through the canal and I sat up all night watching that experience. It was great to go up to the locks and into the big lake and down the locks to the other ocean. The west-end of the canal is further east than the east end. It's crazy to think of it—the way that curves. Then we went around Cuba, came into North Carolina, took off all of our summer gear, put on winter gear and now we wondered where we were going and Senator Wheeler from Montana demanded that they tell the nation where these marines were going. Nobody would tell him and there was a big thing in the paper about that. So at North Carolina I got over to Sumpter and saw all of that and we finally went aboard ship and we were on our way and this time we went up and we made a left-hand turn right into Newfoundland and we went in to Newfoundland and spend a week in there, then we went a week back out, and at that time, all of the capital ships that we had on the Atlantic ocean were taking us up there. We had five ships; three of them 1st, 2nd, 3rd battalion

on then two supply ships. We went in there, and then we made a left hand turn and went right into Iceland and then we landed in Iceland before the war started and we had lot two ships prior to that—the Carney and the Reuben James were destroyers that the Germans had attacked. On of them was sunk and the other one made it into port. Well as we got into the port of Retkovec ships scuttled all over the place and so our ship that I was on, they took one of the supply ships to unload it and it was a comical thing the way they did that. The Icelanders had coffee time four times a day and the British had tea time three times a day and they couldn't work when the other was having coffee or tea time so nothing ever got done. So General Marston, being a Marine General, he moved our ships and our fiord was so deep that you could make two stone-throws and hit the ship. That's how close they were. So all he did was just take all of the big barges off and when we loaded all of our supplies on those barges and one day we had two ships unloaded and the troops and their billets and he told the British, "If you don't move it, I'm bringing my troops in here and we'll unload them." So they did away with teatime and coffee-time and that's the first time the Icelandic government was mad and the British soldiers were... we were Americans so we were not any value to them and anywhere there it was. Most of those soldiers were from Dunkirk that were there on Iceland that had been moved there after that type of thing. So as we went on and then finally Churchill came up to our thing and we had a big parade for him and I'll never forget him as we marched down by there, he was there with a big cigar in his hand smoking there and he'd salute the flag as we went by and it was a good experience to see him. Then President Roosevelt's son came up there. He was in the navy. There were a lot of dignitaries that came in. So finally the night of December 6th came. Maybe I'll tell you a little interesting story just before that. The little camp that I was in called Camp Linley was up the fiord. We were there and this German plane would fly over every week and we never knew when it was coming, but it would come and we didn't have any airplanes and this plane would come over and it finally came over our camp and it flew around and flew around, and then it dropped a little parachute and a cylinder about this long and about this round, and they got the bomb squad in there to take it off and they unscrewed the lid and nothing happened. They pulled out this big piece of paper and pictures and all of this type of thing and in it said, "You marines are doing a great job down here, but if you do this and this and this and this, it would make it harder for us to spot your position." This type of thing is the fifth column you know and I tell you it was a riot. So we never knew and that German plane (I don't know if it's the same one or

not) landed, and we saw it go out and behind the hill—the guy had motor trouble because we heard sputtering and he fixed the darn thing-- and the time we got patrols over there and everybody knew what was going on, he was back in the air and flying home. That was some of the crazy things. But then in the nighttime up there, there comes a day when everybody just stays away and night becomes day and time. So you're just twelve hours in reverse of it. Up on this hillside we could see this every morning and every night you'd see this dot dot dash, dot dot dash dash, dot dot dot dot and nobody could make any headway out of it and they thought that somebody was up there signaling the Germans out there in the ocean with their submarines or something giving weather reports is what Germany wanted.

Geoff: Was this a light signal?

Keith: Yes, a little light signal flashing behind it. You could see it and it was just dot dot dot. So they sent a patrol up there to see what was going on and all it was, was this old guy going out to milk his cows and as he'd swing his lantern like this past these boards that were like this and narrow boards and wide boards and cracks between them, and that's what the dot dash dot dash was. It had nothing to do with anything except it took a marine patrol to get up there and find out what was going on. I'd seen that from where I was in the General's quarters, but know-one had any idea what it was. But now anyway, to get back to your question here... what was I doing? I was on guard duty the night on the 6th of December and in the general's quarters there was a room there where this warrant officer slept where they had a V-like thing there, where if there were any messages directly from Washington this typewriter would automatically start signaling for it and it would type out all of this different stuff that was there. As soon as that light came on, we were to go wake up this warrant officer and he was always asleep on a cot with his 45 in his hand, and he had a sign over his bed, "If you have to wake me during the night, don't touch me except for my feet and hold onto my foot and I'll wake up." He'd come up with his 45 in his hand and so we went in there and the sergeant of the guards shook him and he came up and got his eyes together and he could hear the typewriter going so we waited until it stopped and he took this message out of there and put it over there and then he typed it out and then on his typewriter came the actual message and he swore and said, "Well, we're at war!" And we looked at each other and said, "What happened?" And he said, "Well the Japanese attacked Pearl

Harbor." We were the first ones to know so we went in and woke up General Marston and this I'll never forget as long as I live, as we woke him up and he sat up on the edge of his bed and he had his feet down and his little house slippers were down between his feet, and he took the message just like this and he leaned back and he read it and he just folded it up and handed it back to the warrant officer and said, "Well, there's nothing we can do about it now" and went back to sleep. And I thought, "Gee, here we are at war and nothing to do..." Well, the marines were prepared. There was nothing he could do. If the Germans come we were ready for them--if anybody came we were ready for them. So I thought it was a real lesson of you're prepared, and we were prepared to handle whatever the situation was so then the news broke of the heroic stand of the marines on Wake Island and what a fight that was. We were always wanting to hear the good reports that were coming out and finally the reports stopped coming and so forth, but I finally in my lifetime met two of the marines that were on Wake Island and had a fabulous visit with them and told him how proud I was and they didn't want to surrender. They wanted to fight it out with them and his unit was not on the main island of Wake, they were on another little island and they had repelled about three or four Japanese that tried to invade them, and they were getting low on ammunition so they just took all of the Japanese guns and rifles and ammunition and set up right along with their own. So when the next attack came, they would have had to use Japanese ammunition. But anyway, that story you can find and read about which is fabulous. But that was one of the things, and they refer to it as the Alamo of the Pacific and it was. So that was on D-day and we stayed there in Iceland a little bit longer and then we came back on our furloughs and when I left the ship and got on the train, my buddy Sammy Dulong, who was quite a kid given a choice to join the Marine corps or go to the reform school and so he joined the Marine corps so that was what a lot of the guys were doing. They were tough. When we left Iceland we were under constant German surveillance with their Wolfpack and so forth with their destroyers and that. We zigzagged all over the place to come back. Finally we came into New York harbor and saw the Statue of Liberty. That to me was such an exciting thing. Now we're at war and then to see the Statue of Liberty standing there, it was just a thrilling experience. Everybody was waving and screaming as we went by. We pulled into the harbor and we saw the smoke coming up there and this is when that big French passenger liner was on fire and it was burning and we saw it there and as our little APA went by, it made us look like a rowboat compared to the size of that thing. That was an experience right there. So we got off the boat

and got on the train and finally we rode into Montezuma, Iowa where Sammy got off the train. I came into Ogden, Utah and I got off the train and I walked up to where my uncle Searle's barbershop was and my dad happened to be sitting there getting a haircut and I walked in and here I had my fur hat on and my big coat and my scarf around my neck because it was wintertime and my dad looked up and he said, "Keith, Keith!" And he just slid out of that barber chair, came over and put his arms around me and gave me a big hug, and tears were running down his cheeks and he said, "What happened?" I said, "Well, I'm on my way back to Camp Elliott because we're back there for training now." So then I had a nice furlough and went down to Camp Elliott and while I was in Iceland was when I had take the test for corporal, but they hadn't made me a corporal so when I was home on furlough, I made corporal. When I got back down to camp Elliott there my rank was waiting for me and my little chevrons to put on my sleeve and in those days you'd put it on and as soon as you got it on your sleeve, everybody would hit you, "bang" like this to paste it on or the right or the left arm, or sometimes both arms at the same time and that's a tradition that they still do in the Marine corps to this day. They call it "pasting on your chevrons." So it goes right up to Gunny or master sergeant or whatever you want to do. Then we filled up to full combat strength. We were split and I went into B Company, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines and I stayed there until we came to full strength again and then through training and all of that that we went through I was transferred back to Camp New River, North Carolina where we went through our training then in the 23rd Marines, and the 23rd F Company is right here in Salt Lake. I was the very first gunnery sergeant made from the ranks of the company. We had another gunnery sergeant, Leonard C. Gallagher and he was an old-time marine from China and Nicaragua and so forth, but he is the one who... I was in his platoon in Iceland and he liked me because I didn't smoke, I didn't drink, and I didn't swear. I was sort of a novelty and he knew he could give me a job and it would get done. I have to tell you a story as this happened in North Carolina because this really started things rolling. We went back to North Carolina on the train and that was an experience to be on a military, all troops. It was totally different to eat all of that... I mean it was just a great experience to be there. When Gallagher finally saw my name, he pulled my name off from the list and other guys that were with me that wanted to be me. As we got in there I didn't know that Gallagher was the one and the next morning for roll-call there was old Gallagher as the sergeant in charge and he was the gunnery sergeant and come by and I went over to him and said, "Well, how did you make

gunny?" And he said, well I made it here just about a month or so ago and he said, "I want you to study for sergeant." I said, "Well I just made corporal." He said, "Study for sergeant!" I said, "O.K." So I went in and I started studying for sergeant and in just two or three months I went up for sergeant and made buck sergeant. Now I was a squad leader and I was in the 2nd platoon so I had a good platoon and finally Gallagher came to me and he said, "Keith, I want you to study for staff." And I said, "My gosh I just made buck." And he said, "Study for staff!" So I went in and I started studying for staff and here it came just another couple of months, boom here I was a staff sergeant. And that's when I was a platoon leader and I loved that position as a platoon leader. I had three squad leaders. I had selected my men. I had great men. One of the men who was in my squad was a terrific kid, Emanuel. He was an Italian kid, he was a strong catholic kid, so we had a lot of good visits and talks and he told me later, he said, "I patterned my whole Marine corps career after you Gunny." And I thanked him. I could do no wrong in his eyes. He was there... he was one of those people who you KNEW you could depend on, and that's why I wanted him in my platoon. Then finally I was called in, Gallagher said, "Keith, I want you to study for gunnery sergeant." And I said, "Gunnery sergeant? Your place?" And he said, "I don't know where they'll put you but I'm making master gunnery sergeant and I'm going to be transferred into the artillery." So man what do you do? So I started studying for that and I couldn't believe it. So finally I was put in the field on maneuvers and they called me in to report to Major Williams, and I came in and this little second lieutenant was sitting there at the desk and he looked at me and he looked a little familiar but I wasn't sure I knew him. He finally said, "Well Mr. Renstrom, congratulations. You're going to be interviewed for gunnery sergeant." And I said, "You're kidding." And he said, "That's right." And here they had probably about twelve men and I was the youngest one there. I didn't even have a hash mark on my sleeve and here I was a staff sergeant and finally my turn came and old Gallagher had taken me aside and schooled me in all kinds of little dumb questions that they might ask me. And he wanted to have these right now, so as I went in before Major Williams he shook my hand and he says, "Well, Sergeant Renstrom you've got a good record here and Cummings is looking over your record and so forth, and I think it's an honor that you've been selected to come in here." Well I thought there was no chance for me to get this rank. So I walked in there and all of the officers, even the regimental commander on a rank of gunnery sergeant, they want to know who is the one. And they all vote boy. In those days it was really something else, and so as they started to ask me

questions, one of the questions and the last question they asked me was "If you had ten men to defend a hundred yards of beach, how would you do it?" And I said, "Well, you'd put two men in each hole and that's how you do it." And they all looked at each other and went, "Why would you put every man in every foxhole?" And I said, "That way there is less chance of one of them bolting and getting out of there, because the other one is going to say that he's not going to quit, and the other one would say that he's not going to quit either so you have a combination and stay awake." And Colonel Cummings went, (slap knee), and sat back and so I left. And then they talked about all of the names and finally when my name came up, they turned to Gallagher who wanted somebody and he said, "Well all I can tell you about Renstrom is if you give him a job to do, there may be a better way to do it, but he will get the job done!" And Colonel Cummings again went, "And that's the man we want." So as I left I was called back in and they gave me my rank as gunnery sergeant. So as a gunnery sergeant now I had the responsibility that is awesome, and as I went through that, then we filled combat strength, we split. I went into the F Company, 2nd Battalion, 25th Marines and that's the unit I went overseas with. Then we went down around the Panama Canal and came up to Camp Pendleton then, trained there and then we left Pendleton on board ship and we were the first troops in the United States to go from civilian life into combat. And as we went into combat we were headed for the Marshall Islands and this is where we come into Roy in the More and this is the first territory taken away from the Japanese. It was there islands to start with. So as we came in on that operation, our amphibious tractors, we had to go through instead of attacking it from the ocean, the marine corps and the navy attacked it from inside of the harbor, or the lagoon so we came into two little islands sitting here and we came through there and it was kind of an awful feeling to look there, and there were trees and you couldn't see the Japanese because they were holding back but we knew they were there and we went right through the lagoon over to Alan Island which was our code name and there was a dwarf out there and a big building which was a power plant we found out later, and they called it Ineber(?) was the Japanese name of it and then there were two other little islands, and then there was Roy in the More, the big islands where the airfields were. So we actually landed one day ahead of the main assault and as we came ashore, I'll never forget the sick feeling inside of me as the amphibious tractor touched ground and you knew you were there! In those days you had to crawl over the sides of the amphibious tractor. They didn't let the back or front down and so we crawled over the sides and we started to move in and we hadn't moved very far until the shooting

started, but nothing from the beach and I my company commander was still by the Amtrack making sure everybody was out as we started through and the shooting started and the underbrush was just so thick in that jungle you could hardly see more than about forty feet. It was just dark. Our uniforms were green and I saw this guy off to the left of me in green and he was shooting this way the same direction we were going, so I just thought it was another marine. But then I saw Black and Tedis all go down and I thought, "Gosh, why did they go forward, they usually get hit... you go backwards." Then I heard little Chris cry out, "I got one, I got one!" And then some more exchange of fire and then I looked over and I saw this bullet come right by my head about the size of my arm here just like this. How he missed I don't know, but that bullet went right through the tree and I put my finger up on it and I looked and I saw the guy kill over. Well one of my men shot him because he knew no marine would be shooting back this way. Then I walked over and looked at the guy that almost took me out the first day and I looked at him and I just rolled him over a little bit and that was my first dead Jap that I saw. So in our battle that only lasted about a half hour, we had seven men killed and three men wounded and it should have been seven men wounded and three men killed would have been the proper ratio. So that was the battle of the Marshall Islands. Then we came back to Hawaii, retrained again, filled up again with our replacements, trained extensively and then we got aboard ship and then we headed we headed for Saipan and Tinian. As we came in on Saipan, it was just like a California Beach Head; beautiful palm trees, a great sandy beach. You'd think you were landing on Santa Barbara beach or something. It was just beautiful! Or one of the Hawaiian beaches—it was just unbelievable. And then we came within range, and then the atmosphere changed.

Geoff: Tell us when you hit the beach, and go from there. Tell us what time of day it was...

Keith: Well it was in the morning. I don't remember the exact time. It was just like going on maneuvers. Nothing was happening and the planes were coming in and strafing and bombing and so forth, but there was very naval gunfire. It had more or less ceased way up on the ridges on hill 500 up there where the main Japanese area was. Down on the beach there was nothing. And then we came within the mortar range. Now those mortars were about this big around and huge and if they went off in the air, they would take out two boats in a burst, but we came ashore, our extreme left flank got hit pretty heavily. But when we hit and we rolled out of our

Amtrack's again and we started going again, we had army personnel landing us and I remember we were a little nervous about that but those guys were top soldiers. I have nothing but good to say about them, how they handled themselves. They did more. They even came in further with the Amtrack's than they were supposed to come. But anyway, as we started to move, the line and the fire started to come in and then we were maybe about fifty yards off the beach when the beach really got hit and clobbered. A lot of the boats got hit as they were backing out and so forth and as we moved in, off to my left I saw Lieutenant Boloski, who was a warrant officer, get shot through his hip and he was down and off to his left was a marine laying right out there in the open and his machine was going... "du du du du du..." Bullets were coming down and they were coming down all around me and some of the guys got hit around me and Boloski said, "Gunny, I don't know whether he's hit or not but he's not moving." So I worked my way out there after I was able to get the machine guns to put enough fire where it was coming from to give me time to get out there. And as I got there, his gun was good and right where it was coming from so I rolled over to him and this kid was laying down like this face down and he was just shaking and I called him by name and talked to him and he said, "Gunny, I'm too scared to move. I'm too scared to move!" And so I talked to him for a little bit and I said, "O.K. when you get your act together we've got to go right across that railroad trussel to your right and then up on that hill where that house. Somewhere up in that vicinity is where we're going to be." Well it took him until about four or five o'clock he finally came up there to the line and was o.k. from there on out. But the emotional stress that you have to be trained to handle, that's what we try to do in the marine corps I mean a guy gets killed you can't do anything for him. If he gets wounded you try to get him out of there. But you can't do that. You have to let some of the wounded stay because you haven't got men enough to carry them all back so you've got to let the people behind you take care of them. We went over the railroad trussel and down on the side and through the little swamp area and up on the hill and this Japanese two inch gun, a cannon, knocked out one of the army amphibious tanks and the kids were out of there and off to the left they were by this house with a machine gun and we knocked that out and then we went up on top of the little ridge that was sitting there and off to our right was a pillbox and there was a Sherman tank sitting down there where the gun couldn't shoot forward but he could shoot to the sides, but there were still Japs in there but we knocked that out with hand grenades and a flamethrower and then we went back up on the ridge there and my company commander says, "Gunny I want you

to take a patrol and take this out and see what you run up against..." because we hadn't run into any fire for awhile after the ridge was the first night, after that nothing. So I remember going through these eucalyptus trees and they're about that deep and leaves and you make so much noise, you couldn't sneak up on the enemy, so we walked out and I guess about a thousand yards ahead of that we could hear a Japanese talking and we could hear machine gun fire. But somewhere they had a radio in a tree and that was one of the things that would stop us so we couldn't find it and we didn't know where we were going and we didn't have anybody on our right or left flank so we turned around and came back and reported that there was nothing that far out. We moved the whole company clear across that thing so we went clear beyond our 01 line, which we always had for the first day. And then from there we started to move down on what they called "Magazine Bay" and we came down to this pillbox and E Company was right next to us and one of their officers was standing with his 45 shooting through the slip of this thing as the Japanese were running out and one of the Japanese officers ran right out of the door and came running around like this swinging his saber. Well the kid that Lieutenant Sikes had with him had done something that he should never had done, he had armored piercing in all his magazines. Well-armored piercings go right through you and you don't even know you've been hit, and he shot and emptied his magazine at that Japanese, but the Japanese soldier still was able to get his sword like this and cut the officer right under the rib clear up into his lung and he was coughing and saying, "Stop the blood, stop the blood." Well there was nothing you could do, so he just got weaker and weaker until he died. So that was right there, and there we were, nothing we could do so we went on past that, turned off to the left and we started going up on the back side of Mt. Tagpochau, and that was the highest point on Saipan and that's where hill 500 was and that's where all the mortars and all of their guns were, up there. And then we went from there all the way down to the end of the island to where we called, Murphy Point where the dirt airfield was and we came down this little road and in that book we have I showed you the shells almost down to the bottom, and we got down to the airfield and we stopped right there for the night. We had gone over down to the ocean and checked it out a little bit, and then we came back, set up for the night and gave everybody water and food and then the next day we started to go down the beach and there were Japanese on the big cliffs where they started to jump off the hill where we saw them jump over the hill off of the cliffs down into the bush and as I was going up the water's edge, and there was kind of a cliff here and then there was flat area where you could step around

over the ponds then it would drop down into the ocean so the tide would come back in there all of the time and we started to move and I saw one of the sergeants there said, "Gunny, come here. What do you think of this?" And he said, "I think there is a Jap over there." So we looked and I saw this hand and I saw this hand and then we saw a head pop up like this so I took my Tommy gun and I was aiming right there waiting for his hand to come up. Instead of jumping up he jumped out to the side and he was just standing there shaking like this so I said, "Don't shoot." So the guys listened to me and then we got up and captured him and brought him back. Well further down from that, where there must have been at least fifty to sixty Japanese out there being pushed with soldiers that we could see in the midst where you couldn't shoot into the civilians, and the soldiers were pushing them down and sucking us in and we kept going down and finally we got down to where they opened up on our left flank and then we had Mike Plasha and Gaboda and some of the got killed right there. So we came back on got up on the airfield again and spent the night there and at about two thirty to three o'clock in the morning we could hear this "crunch, crunch, crunch" coming and we wondered "what in the world is that?" So we called the Bailey Destroyer and they fired their star shell over there and lit the whole thing up and it was a herd of about thirty head of cattle coming down the airfield, and they'd stop and smell and then they'd go a little further. Then we'd look under their legs and think we could see Japanese soldiers on the other side, but we couldn't. There was just a herd of cows. So the next day after that was over, we started to move out and we got down on the little trail, and I was with some of the guys and this Japanese man and his family; this wife and this little girl and two little boys—they were probably within fifty yard of me... This is one of the things I wish I would have shot because I had the time but it catches you off guard so quick sometimes you just don't know, and he took the little baby out of his wife's arms and threw it over the cliff and then he pushed this one little boy and this little boy was trying to hang onto his dad's legs and finally the dad hit him and threw him over and then he threw the girl over and then he threw the other boy over, then he and his wife stood and bowed to each other and she hesitated and he pushed her over, then he jumped. Then he was swimming out in the surf, and it was just far enough and I took my Tommy gun and I fired about four shots at him and I missed and one of my men said, "Oh hell Gunny, let me do it." He went "peeewhhh" one shot with his M1 and that was it. So then we retired back and by then the marines had gone over the cliff, down the side where the

Japanese headquarters all were and they pulled us out and we went back over the same territory we had when the big bonsai charge came on Saipan.

Geoff: Tell us about that bonsai charge.

Keith: It took them three or four days to round up all their troops, the Japanese, and the marines that went along with the army, 27th Division there, they were caught. It's too bad what happened on there, but it did and there's nothing you can do about it. Those kids fought their hearts out, but by the time of the bonsai charge we were clear back around the other side of Mt. Tagpochau on 500 down there and then when that bonsai charge started, they question whether it was 2,000, but when I was down at Saipan they estimated it to be over 3,000 Japanese who were killed in that.

Geoff: Tell us about what time of day it was and...

Keith: Well it was just a regular day—nice and sunny, but they did it at night-time, and they charged up right over the army lines that night clear back to the marine artillery which is about 3,000 yards in the marine artillery I think there were ten guns and they had them point blank 155's and those guns were firing and they were red hot from the firing and they were afraid they'd have premature explosions by putting the shell in there, but the training was so well executed and so quick, that before the heat could get there the breach was locked and they pulled the lanyard and the shell went off, and those shells were going off four tenths of a second in front of the guns and that stopped it.

Geoff: So you were fighting?

Keith: I was not there. We were back probably 2,000 yards from where all this was going on.

Geoff: Could you hear it?

Keith: Oh yes. It sounded for about an hour and a half, two hours. Then the 155's, they turned their one gun around and knocked out this Japanese tank that was running around back there. Well you hit a Japanese tank with a 155 and there's nothing left of it. So then we stayed on Saipan and we went down and they gave us our first bath by just squirting water out of a hose and we got washed and so forth and after that, and we kind of got cleaned up, where you have to make a decision and these are the decisions to be made... here came a group of people walking up this road that we had just been on and we were camping here and this other company was down there with their machine guns, one on each side of the road, and they challenged the people walking there, but they gave the password which was the one two days earlier and they talked about different things and speaking perfect English. Well this kid now had to make a decision to shoot or let them go and so he let them go and they came up a little bit closer and then both guns opened up and hitting all of these Japanese that were down there. There was about a platoon of them, so there would be about thirty to forty of them and they came running and we had picked up a bunch of little kids that night and this one little Japanese girl was just a beautiful little thing, probably about five years old and it was cold and rainy and I put her under my poncho trying to keep her warm and give her something to eat and drink and then I had let her lay behind my back and she went to sleep, and then when this attack came I sat up quick and she didn't even wake up and it jerked my poncho off of her and I couldn't shoot because our men were standing up and it was Japanese running every which way and they all ran right through us up in the side of the hill. We got a few of them but I never shot at anybody because I wasn't sure if I'd hit my own men. The next day after that we went back down closer to the beach and had good chow and stuff and then we prepared to go to Tinian.

Geoff: Tell us how close Tinian is to Saipan.

Keith: Oh about two miles. When we hit Tinian we hit way to the right of where this pillbox was and that pillbox was there when I went back so on Saipan the beach is retreated about 200 yards, so the big palm tree that I wanted to see and say hello to was washed away years ago through a storm so the beach is no longer where we fought. It's about 200 yards of water now. But on Tinian I stood in the exact spot that I got out of the amphibious tractor. As we hit that beach and we started to move in off of our amtracks at the beach, the amtracks ran right up

against the coral cliff so you could just stand on the amtrack and jump ashore and mine was just next to that one and we couldn't do that and when we got out we were in water up to our necks to walk in, so we all got wet, but the next one over there and from there all the way down where I was, we were about the third one, when we got out we were in water up to here you know.

Geoff: Were you under fire?

Keith: Yes, just after that. But we got ashore, and then as we started to move in this Japanese kid in a pillbox opened up and I was right behind Sergeant Fields and he was ahead of me and there was a sloping little ledge like the ground here and then a slope where they had the cane fields up here and I started to go and Sergeant Fields was just ahead of me like this and this Jap shot him. The bullet went through this arm, and this arm—both of his arms were hit and he couldn't go anywhere and his rifle was still in his hands so we all stepped on his back and then on his head and shoulders and got up over the hill and then one of my men shot the guy in the pillbox. Then we started to move in and we moved into the right. There was a road over to our right that we had to come to and we finally got to the road, and that was our right flank and then we went straight on in about 2,000 to 3,000 yards and then we stopped and we were under fire constantly all the way up there. We had a tank with us and the tank got up there and one of our men got up on top of the tank and was directing the fire of the tank to where he needed it when Healey got hit and he fell off of the tank and there was nothing they could do so they went further on up and I was right on the extreme left of that and all of the engineers that were attached to us were right behind us and when we started to move, this one engineer kid didn't move. When we got over there to him he had been shot right through the throat with a piece of shrapnel that had come from somewhere and he was dead and his blood was all laying down there. So then we moved on to our 01 line and we set in for the night. Now this is my story. This is where I got one of my citations. I gave the word... this road that came along like this way down here about two or three blocks and then it came across like this where the other unit was, so our battalion came up like this and over here, and right on this little corner here was the end of one of the cane fields that had been cut down and then there was cane standing all over the rest of the place. Down this road there was cane, and down this road there was cane. When I got up there and saw what I had to defend that night, Sergeant Pruitt got his arm shot off there

and it had to be amputated and the Corps man just laid the rifle down and took the knife that they had, a big hatchet, and laid his arm there and whacked it off because there was no way to save it, it was too gone and the bone was broken and everything else in his arm. We just buried his arm right there where he was hit and put him on a stretcher and got him out of there. As I looked over the thing, my company commander says, "Gunny, I want you to go over and take over that platoon for the night. They'll feel better with you doing it than bringing in an officer from a battalion." So they did. The guys were pretty well shook up because they had lost most men right then, so I had the first platoon on my right and I had the second platoon and we bent right around the corner like this. My foxhole was right there and then I had the first platoon on my left so the third platoon was on my right and I was right in the middle. As I looked to that situation while they were digging their foxholes, I went down out here and down this road and went down quite a ways and back and down another trail to look and see what I had to see, and I didn't see anything except one Japanese soldier who came jumping out. I didn't know if it was a marine or a Jap because I was too far away. We both started walking together and then finally I realized it was Japanese, and he realized I was a marine so we both took a shot at each other and he ran and jumped in the cane field and then I came back up and around the line and got back with men and when I came up to where my men were, I realized they were too close to the cane field. We had no field of fire at all. So I told them to fill their foxholes in and move back about twenty to twenty-five yards back and they were moaning and groaning and complaining like in your book there it says, "If you would have ran for dog-catcher you would have never got elected." They were unhappy over it, but I knew it was right, and he said he knew that Gunny was right so they did what I asked them to do and then I passed the word and said, "When you hear my Tommy Guns fire then you open fire." And they said, "O.K." So all down this road my platoon, then the first platoon went on down there, Sergeant Sikes had his machine guns down there and as they, probably around 11:30 or 12:00 at night, here came this Japanese patrol and they came right down that thing. Well I'd read everything I could about the Japanese and I knew that they would do just like we'd have; half of them on one side staggered and half on the other side. So the guys let them go all the way down that road. Nobody shot. Nobody did anything until there was a road that ran right into the other troops, and then those troops opened up and they got them all but one, and that one guy came running right past us, stopped and sat down in the middle of the road and rested and we could have shot him, but we didn't and he went back

and reported back to, I'm sure, his people that the marines were on the third row of trees down there and they weren't where we were. That's because you don't shoot all of the time, and we didn't want to give away our position. So then the next thing that came were the tanks. Here came six tanks and they came right down there and stopped right on the road, all six of them and they were opened up and running and you could hear them talking Japanese and then they finally buttoned themselves up and went down the road and then they went down the road until they ran into the same thing and they knocked them out with the 37's and the half-tracks and one of them got back inside and was running around back there and they finally knocked that one out, but the sixth tank just turned around and came right back up the road, stopped right where my line was and I was in my foxhole thinking, "What am I going to do?" Well I took some water and made a little puddle of water and I thought the best thing to do was to make a handful of mud and smear it over the aperture that way he couldn't see out and if he opened to see, we could drop a grenade in there. Well, he couldn't see but I didn't have to do that because he stopped, opened up the tank's hatch, and he started to get out and then our bazooka man, doing exactly what I asked him to do, and you can see in that picture that I gave you, the little tree he was sitting under, he walked out and touched the tank with his hand, backed up about twenty yards, fired a shot, set it on fire and got wounded by his own shell, and so there he was. Then after the fire had gone down, here came the main assault, and they came still thinking, I'm sure, that we were at the third row of trees and they just came walking through the cane field and I waited until they got within about ten yards when I opened up. I sat up with my Tommy gun and I had a thirty round clip in it and I just started like this.... tu du tu du tu du, and as I fired my first shot, the whole line opened up; machine guns, rifles and everything else. Well right in front of my foxhole there was about, I would say, a guy about ten years here and ten yards on each side, we had about thirty five Japanese right in front of us and then there were another thirty five or so back in the cane field, so it was around seventy that we wiped out right then, and it was the whole Japanese weapons section and you saw in that picture all of the big guns. There were four of those and there were seven nambu machine guns, all of those little mortars never fired a single shot on Saipan and because of that they gave me one of my bronze stars. Then the next day after that attack and everything, everybody came up and were amazed to see what we had done so we gathered up our wounded and replaced them and so forth, and now I only enough men for two platoons because Sikes platoon that night got in a fight so bad that two of the gunners were killed

and then Sikes said he was with the other gun and he saw this flash and he took his BAR that he carried went to shoot it but the shrapnel had hit the magazine and it wouldn't fire so he pulled his pistol and he went "bam bam" and killed two Japanese but one of them bayoneted him right through the hand and he was hanging onto the bayonet through his hand while he shot these other two and then he shot this guy right in the head and then he pulled the bayonet out of his hand and stayed there until the next morning and then we shipped him back to the ship and he went back and got his hand early in the morning daybreak, he got his hand fixed, but he came back to us and was able to stay with us that night. As we started to move out we didn't have hardly any action at all and just a few little spots until about four o'clock in the afternoon and we'd gone quite a ways up into the coral cliffs and there was a little gulley that kind of ran along there and I saw this Japanese rifle come out behind the hill and fire at somebody down to my left and then I didn't think anything of it and I went on there and I took about ten steps and I was just standing there, you know, waiting for the guys to catch up to me when he shot me right through my leg there and it hit and I spun around and I thought, "I'd better fall down or he'll hit me again" but when he shot me he had to raise up to shoot me, one of my men shot and killed him. So I laid there, and as my men came by I gave them my water to drink and filled their canteens up with my canteens and took a good drink of my own water and then they brought the jeep up to put me on there and as I looked at my pant leg here, the bullet went right through there and came out... you can see the spot back here real easy, but you can hardly see it here, and I cut my pant leg all the way down to this point here, opened it up, put my bandage on it, and I looked at my pant leg there and I thought, "Gee, that will make a good souvenir!" So I took my combat knife and I cut out the little square where the bullet went in and I put my pant leg around here and I cut that little square out and those are in the museum in Orem, and my tag that they tagged me with stating that at four o'clock in the afternoon on July 25th is when I got hit and so forth and I had it in my pack and my wife laughs about it that I was collecting the souvenirs of the war there on the battlefield. But that's in the Orem museum. Then they took me back and my leg was so stiff just like this, and I couldn't bend it and they set me on the jeep on the front seat and I tied my leg up on the little fender thing so it would rest there a little bit. They took me back to the APA and then they took me over to Saipan and they took me off of that and put me in this big army hospital that was right on the beach and I could lay in my bunk and watch the line move down everyday as it would move further down, further down until it got so far away I couldn't see it,

and I just watched the battle. It was that close. When it came time for me to leave, I heard that they were going to transfer us to something else and I went around there and I told the guys, "I'm leaving" and this army kid was just a super guy, a medic, and I said, "Listen, you have to get me out of here" and he said, "Well you have to have the offers" and I said, "Listen, I'm a gunnery sergeant in the marine corps and I want to be with my troops and I want to be back there." So he said, "I don't know." I said, "What you do is you get all of these papers there and put my paper in the middle of them and as you release them, he'll sign them and not even know what he's signing." And the kid says, "I guess that's about right." So he did, and he signed my papers so that I could be released to go back there and he said, "Well, we can't tell anybody." And I said, "We're just not going to tell anybody, don't say anything. He won't even ask you, there's too many of them. You got to work the odds." And he laughed. I had about six guys that came with me that we got out of there and they were minor wounds you know and they wanted to get back there with their units. Now how do we get from Saipan back to Tinian? So I borrowed a navy jeep and an army trailer and I talked to two of the sailors that had come off of our APA and they said, "We'll take you over there in our boats." So we backed this trailer right back in the R boat, then they took us all the way down to the exact spot where we landed practically. Everybody was gone. There was nobody there anymore just the vehicles that had knocked out the tanks and amtraks that were in the water so I went over there. I borrowed a couple of M1s and two carbines and we got some Jap rifles so everybody had something. We got in the jeep and drove ashore and said goodbye to the sailors, waved at them and they went off and laughed and away we went down the same road past the tank I'd knocked out, right on down the road until we came to Tinian town. When we got down to Tinian town, that's where the marines were loading now because the battle was over and they were loading aboard ship and I got there just as they were going down the thing to get on the boats and my company commander said, "Gunny what are you doing here? How did you get here? How did you make it?" I laughed and said, "Well, here I am." So I got aboard the APA to bring us back to Hawaii and every day I'd go in and have them dress my wounds. They would say... the Doctor over there was pretty smart, he said if I would walk and move it would heal up from the inside, and that's what it did, it healed up from the inside out. If it had healed the other way, then they would have to cut in there and drain it and so forth. So that's my story of Tinian.

Geoff: Lets get to Iwo Jima.

Keith: OK, here we go. And then we went back and replaced our wounded and dead, came up to full combat strength and then we had no idea where we were going to go and then when we were finally on the ships, they passed out all of the maps and everything and that map that I have is where I got that, that was issued to me to show us what we were going to fight against and every ship, every airplane, everybody had that same map. From that map is where we directed fire from the navy and the air-force and anybody where we wanted something hit and there's a little systematic way that you go about doing that so that you can bring the shells in within fifty yards of your lines and you don't recommend them any closer than that but you can bring them in that far. On Iwo Jima we were scheduled to land a four o'clock in the afternoon, but the 3rd Battalion had hit and had suffered so many casualties getting down to the quarry that they felt that they were not strong enough to withstand a bonsai charge if they came. Now bonsai charges are the weakest point in the marine lines because you're just setting up, but the Japanese in all of our landings never ever broke the marine lines. We were able to handle that. But here was an ideal place to have a bonsai charge was at the quarry from the quarry edge out to the ocean, about a hundred yards or so out there would have been perfect, and it ran all the way up the island where they could have come. So as we scheduled to leave, we were in the boats about eleven o'clock that morning and they had landed around eight o'clock in the morning and we came in and as you're landing in the boats off of the cargo nets over the side, you have to go over the cargo net into these amtraks that were coming ashore, or the R-boats this time that lets the front end down, and as the boat is going up and down, on the leeward side it's not so bad, but on the other side you might have thirty feet from the time you're up here to the bottom, and you've got to know when to let go to drop in there. So you've got a whole cargo net of guys and they're going over the windward side, and so the ones right at the very bottom when you meet that apex you got to say, "Drop!" and everybody lets go and drops into the boat, and you might drop three or four or five feet. But if you drop the other way, and you have to have somebody telling them when to drop, then they go back down to the line to the next line when it comes up the next time to do that, and it takes some time to get the boats loaded. So the leeward side always got loaded first and the boats would go around the bow like this, about ten boats going out there, then in the middle of the ship you had two more going around like this back here and then one off of the fan

tail, so you actually had four of these little circles of boats. When all of the boats were loaded, then they ran up a flag on the ship and you know you're heading for the line of departure. Then we came all the way... and we were at the extreme right flank. I think there was only one other ship on our right, and all the rest of the battle was taking place to our left, so we came up to there where the battle wagons and cruisers were, came through them and the sailors were waving us good things, and some of the guys were doing the thumbs down and using other expressions that you don't want to talk about, but everybody knows what I'm talking about, and so we went past the battle wagons and the battle wagons would fire you could see all nine shells in the air, leave the guns and you could follow them right on over to the ocean, or to the land. And when they hit, it just blew up everything. Well, now the marines were ashore and they were shooting on the far end of the other side of the island and then up on the main part of the island. So we came in, and we got ashore. As we went past, there's two little picket ships all the way long there... the line of departure ships. So you line up in between those picket ships and everybody is sitting there bouncing around in the water and then finally they run the flag up to move and everybody, the whole skirmish line goes in and you're ten minutes from that picket line to the shore, about ten minutes. And people ask, "What were you doing?" Well a lot of the guys were playing, of all things, this game Battleship. They were sitting there playing just as if like you're going on maneuvers. I mean you hear all of this weird stuff. I don't know how the army reacted but the marines who were around me and my company--it was just part of your job. You'd just go on maneuvers, going there and do our job and go home you know. And it was suppose to last for three days. Well it didn't. It lasted about a month! As we came in, there was all kinds of debris on the beach—everything. And we came in and just before we hit the beach, the salvo hit, and it just jumped like this. Now there are dead and wounded marines up there, all kinds of equipment, everything. So there is everything blowing all over the place. And we hit the beach and then we moved in across the beach, and that picture that I have is when I was just getting my hand up to wave the rest of them to come ashore. We went up the sand dunes or this coral thing, got up on top and we had just got our company up there when the next salvo hit so the salvo was in the air on it's way to clear us and that's why we said, "Get off of the beach! Get off of the beach!" Clear the beach because they can't move their guns that fast to follow you in because it's too much territory but on the beach they just shell the beach and if those shells hit in the boats... now some of the boats got hit on their way out, backing out and others of them didn't get hit at

all. So then we hit the beach and that's when Rosenthal took my company commander's picture with me laying on the beach of Iwo Jima. Then we turned and went right down parallel to the beach down to the quarry and on our way down there is where little Macy, we saw his legs go out from under him and he went down and my company commander said, "Gunny, get over there and see how bad he's hit." And when I crawled over there, Macy was down in the bottom of this hole about eight or ten feet deep down there and he had his pants down, and he was saying, "And not even any blood, and not even any blood." I said, "What happened?" Well this piece of shrapnel about the size of my hand had hit him right on his back pocket and he had a cribbage board in his pocket. And that cribbage board was just smattered to nothing but slivers and it had hit him just like that, knocked his legs out because that shrapnel is going 300 miles and hour when it hits you and if it hits you side-ways, it will take your arm or head or leg off or it will rip right through you. But this happened to hit him flat just like that, so Macy, who was a little Italian kid, he had a bad nose that had red infection in it and they couldn't get it to stop, but he was just a super little marine. Then we went further up there and my company commander and I were there and one of my sergeants hollered, "Gunny, come here!" So I got over there and there were two or three marines that were killed and lying there and he says, "You know, a guy could get killed around here couldn't he?" I said, "They have." And he said, "I know it!" That was one of the things. There's always something funny that happens in the tragedy of all of this. We came all the way down to the quarry and we started up in the quarry, the guys ahead of me got up there finally and Jocelyn, my company commander and the CP that I was with, we came up there and I was sitting at the top of this little trail getting the machine guns up there when the machine gun (Cobb's section) was coming up, and we had half of the gunners up there already, this mortar shell lit down there and hit his leg and hurt his leg terribly and Cobb called for me he said, "Gunny, Gunny!" And I couldn't do anything and get down to him until they got everybody else up there. And when they got up, I went back down to him and I held him in my arms and I said, "Cobb, you're hit but you're not hit so bad that they can't help you." And I patted him on the shoulder and talked to him and the corps men came down there and bandaged his foot up and so forth and we helped him get down off of the trail back down to more level ground where we would get a stretcher to get him back up the beach, and it still haunts me today to hear him holler, "Gunny, Gunny, Gunny!" Well one of my life, fifty years later I was on my way to a reunion, and we stopped in another town just out of Memphis, Tennessee to see Cobb. He was

in the hospital and it was the same day, fifty years later, not the same hour, but the same day and it was in the evening and I went into the hospital and met his lovely wife and his family and everything else and Cobb had told me he said, "Gunny, I raised my family on you. I said Gunny would do it this way, and that's the way we're going to do it!" And so his kids were telling us about that and we were all laughing about it. And so everybody was just moving out of the door and I went over and I sat on the edge of the bed and I picked him up in my arms and I held him and I said, "Cobb, you know what I was doing sixty years ago today?" And he says, "Yes!" I said, "I was holding you in my arms sixty years ago." And he says, "I know, I know." And I said, "Cobb, you were a great marine and I'm sure proud to have you in my company and know you." A big smile came across his face and then I went in there and he died about eight months later, but that was one of the things of comraderie that lives with you all of your life.

Geoff: What day are we at now?

Keith: Probably around the third day. Every day was totally different but we were sort of stuff, but now we started to move forward and we one of the pillboxes there where the gun had been knocked out by the navy and it was all jammed up but over in the corner, where they brought the ammunition up, flashed a flashlight down through there and it was about this high off the ground and this gun, it wasn't a big gun but a pretty good sized one, probably and 81 or bigger in that vicinity and this little square hole over there... There were three levels I could see where tunnels came into that—two of them, one on top of the other, and then one on the bottom on the side. So we weren't sure who was down there, so back down where all of this high explosive gasoline was, high octane stuff for the planes, we rolled one of those up that hill and end over end got it over the top and then we had to get the darn thing open. How are you going to get it open? We didn't have the tools or anything so I took bayonets and we tied the ends together like this with wire and then we put it on this... it happened to be one that was square and sticking up. If it had been a whole one going down, we couldn't have done it, but this one had square things... then we held our hands on it and twisted it and it worked and we got that thing out and then we tipped it over and let this gasoline run over and down that hole and left the fifty-gallon drum just sitting there and let the gasoline sit overnight and that is one of the best explosives that you've got. I mean it is a great weapon. The next morning after we'd had breakfast and got all of this

done, my company commander says, "Well, who is going to go set it off?" Nobody wanted to do it and I said, "O.K. Captain, I'll do it." So I took a phosphorous grenade and I came up there and crawled up on the side of this big cement wall. The wall was probably about this high now and the roof was this thick you know. I crawled around there and checked everything and I took this phosphorous grenade and I pulled the pin and I just rolled it over there and it went down that hole and it went off in about seven seconds and when the flyer... I don't know what was down there but that island where we were, it shook like an earthquake and the fire came up out of there and hit the roof and then jumped out about thirty to forty yards out like a giant flamethrower and there was a fire right behind it so there was probably one tunnel that went off and the next tunnel went off. It was just like "whhhhheeeet whew whew" just one behind that and everything was shaking like crazy and I looked back, and two or three of the sergeants were back there and they were laughing and I said, "Boy, that was a good one wasn't it?" I have no idea what's down there and if I can find that cave, I want to go it when I go back on the third of March and see what was down in there because something exploded—whether it was shells from that gun up there, I don't know, but boy it was a real jolt and that whole ground where I was just bounced ya off of the ground. It was one of those experiences that you don't forget, you know? And then we came back after that and we started to move and one of the sad things I fail in company as we started to move and get the guns up in place. We were fighting all the way along and when you get in a firefight you have to stop until you clean out the snipers and get it cleared. I left one of my sergeants there to bring the guns up, and I said, "Stay within about 200 yards of it." That night I came back to set the guns up, there were no guns. We had about two machine guns that we kept up in the front, we couldn't use all of the others. All the rest of them were back and where is he? We couldn't find anything so we never knew whether he had got hit or what had happened—no communication. So I sent two runners out and he came back and said, "Gunny they're back there right where we left this morning, they haven't gone." I said, "What happened to the sergeant?" He said, "I don't know." He told him to stay there until he came back. Then I came running back down there five or six hundred yards and we got back there and I said, "Why didn't you guys follow us?" And they said, "Well we were told to stay here Gunny." I said, "Leave your ammunition and take one belt and get those guns up in place and then we'll come back and get the ammunition. So that's what they did and they just ran their hearts out and this one kid was such a dedicated little marine and he was carrying the gun over his back. Now you break those

water-cooled guns down into the barrel, and the tripod, and the ammunition that you carry and all of this sort of stuff. By the time he got that gun up on line, he was spitting blood. I had him lay down and I had the corps man take a look at him and he just laid there and said, "Gunny, I did it. I did it. I got the gun up here." And that dynamic force that when you're under pressure, you don't think of yourself, you think of the importance of getting that gun up there, and so that's one of the stories that I feel shows the dedication that those men had. We went back and brought all of the ammunition and stuff and water up. You have to carry it. There's no way you can get trucks, and that was such rough terrain. I've never been in terrain like that on the extreme right flank of Iwo Jima. It was undergrowth, and it wasn't jungle-like, it was just little canyons and groove after groove after groove and they had tunnels through them all and you'd have to blow them down and blow them shut in order to keep moving and it took time and a lot of men lost their lives doing that. And then one of the nights we were sitting there, Sergeant Delray(?), he was a big kid and the biggest guy on the company and we called him Tiny and he was from San Angelo, Texas and Vilaray had been one of the N.C.O.'s that helped trained the officers back at Quantico as part of his marine corps career and he was a super marine and a super guy.

Everybody liked Paul. He was just one of those easy-going guys. He would follow me around and I'd say, "Tiny, why don't you stay in the C.P.?" And he'd say, "Gunny it's safer with you than anyplace else." Safer with me? I'm up on the line and all over the place. I don't know though—the man upstairs really sheltered me a lot from some of the stuff that happened to me. I've been around all of this stuff and guys being killed and wounded and the explosions and all this type of stuff. Well anyway, we were there and we got all of the lines set in and Paul was in charge of the weapons platoon and once the guns are in position... he and I stayed together and we had this little cave that we were sitting in and it was kind of raining and drizzling and wet and miserable and cold and we had just eaten and our feet were on wood boxes. We didn't know what they were because we couldn't read it and it was getting nighttime. While we were sitting in there, it was probably about 2:30 and

Vilaray was supposed to be watching and I woke up and he was snoring and I shook him and said, "Paul, Paul!" He came to and just about this time this Japanese soldier came walking down the pathway and you're startled. I mean here you are and all I could see was the silhouette and the ocean behind it and the moonlight back and there he was. Before I could get my tommy gun ready to shoot, one of the guys right from us shot him and brought him down. We probably

should have captured him and that would have been better for us, but they shot him right there and we just rolled him over. That was that night. The next night we had moved further in a little bit and the same type of thing—blowing up the caves and moving along, moving along and moving the wounded out and the dead brought back and I was just laying on my back and I used to sleep on my back with my tommy gun across my chest and my 45 right here, and I always slept with that in my hand. With a 45 you can put eight rounds in it, seven in the clip and one in the barrel, so all you have to do is pull the hammer back and fire it, half cock, so that gives you eight shots instead of seven. I was laying there and I always kept a Japanese bayonet in my left hand because it was a little curve on it, so if a Japanese does come to hit you, you've got something to catch him and hook his bayonet and ward it away from you. Well I was asleep and not asleep and I looked up and here this Japanese soldier was standing right with his rifle like this looking at me, and I looked at him and I had just started to move my hand to shoot him when one of the guys in the next foxhole shot him. If you don't think that doesn't put the adrenaline back into your system, boy you're awake. You don't want to go asleep again. I stayed awake then the rest of the night. But things like that happened constantly and then we did have earlier, right after the first day, when we got up on the quarry, one of the officers jumped into this hole and it was nighttime and the shells were coming in and the next morning it was funny, here he came back into the C.P. and he says, "Wow, what a night I had." And Jaws and my company commander said, "What happened?" And he says, "I spent the night with a Japanese soldier in my foxhole." We said, "What did you do?" And he said, "Well, I jumped into this foxhole and there was a guy in there and I didn't say anything and he didn't say anything because I wasn't sure he was a marine or who he was or whether he was dead or what he was. And all of a sudden in the morning when it started to break into daylight, we both woke up at the same time and he was a Japanese soldier and I was a marine officer and he jumped up and I jumped up and I came back here, and he went that way." My company commander said, "Why didn't you shoot him?" And he said, "Well you don't shoot your bed partner." I mean funny things like that happened, but that was one of the strangest ones I think I ran up against while I was there... to spend the night and not even realize what you're doing you know. But at the same time you know, this goes back a little bit... there was this Japanese soldier that had been killed by the 3rd Battalion, and in their packs they had canned crab meat that was delicious and there was no dry place to sit and I had cut this pack open and took out about three cans of crab meat and I was sitting on this

dead Jap on his back on his pack and sitting right on top of him eating this crab meat, and this marine corps general came up there and I said, "General, you better not go any further, there's sniping right there, right now." He was coming up to see why we were pinned down and why we couldn't move you know. So we'd had a little conversation and I said, "Would you like a can crabmeat?" And he said, "Ya." So I passed him a can of this crabmeat right out of the pack of this guy I was sitting on, you know and I finished mine and he took his back. That was one of the crazy things that happened.

Geoff: How did it all end for you?

Keith: It was pretty much every day was the same thing. I would make a routine check of all of the N.C.O.'s that I had. I should have brought that book. I have a little book of it—the last day I was there showing what my company was and how many corporals I got and how many men in this platoon, how many men in that platoon, how many replacements do we have to have to keep things moving, and then I would report that to my company commander and he would call that in to the battalion and the battalion would distribute the replacements for us. And so every day if we could we would get replacements and one of their little replacements, old Duke, this was his first day on Iwo. Before I got in doing all the things I did I saw this kid and he had no helmet or rifle, no equipment, no pack, nothing. And I said, "What are you doing? Where is your helmet?" He said, "I don't have one." And I said, "How come you're up here?" Well he was a marine aboard one of the cruisers and they had brought some supplies ashore and he deserted them and came up to the front line to join us and I said, "O.K. come on boy, you're in F Company now." So I went over there and took off the helmet of one of the marines that had been killed and he was a B.A.R. man and I took his B.A.R. belt off and shortened it up for him and made it smaller and took his canteen and washed the blood off of the belt so it was cleaner, put the belt on him and gave him the B.A.R. and he kept that B.A.R. all the rest of the time, and he did live through the whole thing and came back as one of the few that made it through. He was just a sheer volunteer. We had to call the battalion and tell the battalion to tell the regiment, the division, called the ship to tell the ship where he was and the officer on the ship wanted him back and General Case said, "He's staying!" So there is one of the little stories—to be on the front line, a marine, he could do anything. That was one of the little side things that happened.

Geoff: How did you know, not necessarily from orders or radio, when the battle was tipped your way?

Keith: One of the things that happened... the very first day on Iwo Jima, we were almost to the quarry and there was a box that the third battalion opened up that had rations in it, you know. The top was there, and the bottom had been busted, so there was a foot of a foxhole so I took the box and pounded it down in the ground because it would just cave in on you. I was sitting down there and my head was up here about this high and right over here was the top of that little box thing and off to my left there was an explosion, just one explosion, and I looked up and it was about 1500 to 2000 yards away and I thought that was too far to worry about and I just went on eating and a few seconds later I heard this things coming.... "whew whew whew whew whew..." and "bang" it hit this board right at the top and took a little chip out of it and that is part of that shrapnel that I gave you, and little piece of shrapnel came all of that way and if I'd had been like this, I wouldn't be talking to you today. But I was back there and it went right across my face and hit that board and knocked a piece of the board out, and when I picked it up, it was so hot I couldn't handle it so I went on eating and then I picked it up and I thought it would make a pretty good souvenir and put it in my pack and brought it home. So then as we moved on, everyday was pretty much the same—wounded, dead, wounded, dead, getting them out of there and making the sacrificing that a lot of the men do to put their lives in danger to retrieve the body or the wounded, especially the wounded. And then when we had made a really good push and gained quite a bit of ground, the kid that was in charge of this one platoon got killed and Sergeant Terry took over because he was the platoon sergeant, so he took over the platoon to act as the platoon leader, the officer, and Terry got killed so then the company commander said, "Gunny, can you go over and take over that platoon?" So I did, and I went over and I would do that until we got somebody to replace me and then I'd come back and take over my own duties as gunnery sergeant but Terry had got hit so I went up and got the platoon ready and we were trying to knock out this position and we started to move on it and I saw this hand come up over a wall and "bang" like that—their grenades have to be detonated—and then the guy pulled back and raised up over the thing and he threw the grenade and I shot him and he fell over the wall and then I took aim again to hit him again because he started to crawl back, and the grenade had gone

down all over that thing with roots and so forth and the grenade had rolled underneath there and the kid that was with me as new and when you get caught in a place like that you just shoot it with your rifle. You put your rifle right up by it and shoot it and you blow it away, knock it away. When it does go off you have a better chance of living through it. Well he said, "Gunny, I can't hit it." I knew the seven-seconds of time were gone and I just turned like this and ducked my head and the grenade went off. Several pieces hit my helmet. One piece went under my helmet into my lip and down into my jaw bone, and you could see the hole down in there in my jawbone, a blue spot. And then I still carry two pieces in my arm to this day and a piece because I turned like this, and another piece went in behind my heart and it's still there. I have a picture of that from the V.A. and it cost my ten dollars to buy it but there you can see the two pieces in my arm and the piece behind my heart. Now I had to be evacuated so I stayed with my platoon until we got up there and we wiped out that sniper and got the line moved up to that way and then I came back to the C.P and turned myself in and they put me in the book and then I walked back down with the other wounded back to the battalion, and we went back to the regiment and they took me out to the hospital ship. I got on the hospital ship and found out I wasn't as badly wounded as I thought I was but I couldn't get back to the troops. They wouldn't let me go.

Geoff: When you were doing the fighting, could you see Suribachi?

Keith: Oh, all of the time. On Suribachi—it was on the extreme left flank of us and we were on the extreme right flank so we were like three miles away from it.

Geoff: So did you see the flag go up?

Keith: I don't know. All we did is about the fourth day Lieutenant Craig said, "Look at all of the action up there." And with my glasses you could see a lot of people up there and then the flag came up, but I don't know if it was the first, second, third or fourth. I have no way of knowing, but we did see the flag go up. I don't think that it was Rosenthal's.

Geoff: What did you think when the flag went up?

Keith: Oh boy, I'll tell you we had the high ground and that meant stuff. They had the high ground on our left flank, had control of it, but from then on it's just a matter of time. We were now working on the high ground on the right flank and the 5th Division came up on that side where I was in the 4th Marine Division and we were hanging onto the right flank and that was really not open territory. I mean it was pretty rough, but it made you feel that you had control of the island and when the flag goes up, it was just a satisfying great feeling just to see those stars and stripes flying over the highest piece of ground over the island. Yes, it was an exciting moment.

Geoff: How did the other guys react?

Keith: Oh, everybody yelled and screamed and fired their rifles off. We just did that on our own when we realized and saw the flag and several machine gunners observed a couple of bursts and stuff like that.

Geoff: So, tell us about Rosenthal, the photographer that took the famous photo.

Keith: Well Rosenthal ashore with the 2nd battalion. He came ashore with our company and that boat right down there is the one he was in, but Balinski was the guy that held his leg while he took that picture right there, and he stayed with us all of the way down to the quarry and took a lot of pictures. I showed you some of those, and one of them says, "Rosenthal" on the back of it. He stayed there with us that first night and then the next day he took off for Suribachi.

Geoff: Lets pretend we can both see that one photo of you. This one here--tell us about this photo and who took it.

Keith: Rosenthal took it and that's me laying on the left and that's my Company Commander, Captain Henry Van Joselyn on the right and that was just short of noontime, either before or after. It was around noontime, because we weren't suppose to come ashore until four o'clock that afternoon but to come in, and you can see the wounded and dead marines further back up there and the tanks and the amphibious tractors and all that type of stuff and this is where the shells

were pounding. We had a thing... "Get off of the beach!" Everybody screamed, "Get off of the beach!" We had just hit the beach and that's the first time down and I was just getting ready to go like this and wave the guys on and my Thompson sub-machine gun is laying right up by my head on a piece of cement and my company commander was back there with the radio. Then we got up on the ridge, turned the right flank and went all the way down to the quarry.

Geoff: Were you aware of Rosenthal? Were you aware he was there taking pictures?

Keith: Ya. I looked up when he took the picture.

Geoff: Did you have anything go through your head?

Keith: No. Just like that... I just looked up there and before you see this sign, Joselyn had waved at him like this you know, and I guess he just took that picture because he knew my company commander and me. That's all I can say. But he followed us all the way down to the beach and then the next day he went back up to the other side.

Geoff: Tell us again, a full sentence, when Rosenthal came on the beach with you.

Keith: Well, Rosenthal came aboard with that boat right there and Balinski was holding his leg and then they jumped off of the boat and came over to the left where we were and took the picture of what's laying right there, then he took a lot of other pictures all the way down and that was Rosenthal who did it.

Geoff: Tell us who Rosenthal was.

Keith: He was just a photographer. There were a lot of marine photographers around.

Geoff: Why was he so important?

Keith: He wasn't important until the flag went up and that made him important. He was just another reporter. I don't think he was a marine, I think he was just from the photo service.

Geoff: We left off at the rock quarry. Why don't you start there.

Keith: We had worked our way from where we'd landed to the right and we had come down into the extreme right flank of what they refer to as "The Quarry." As we started to take that, we were relieving the 3rd battalion as fast as we could as we could get up on top of the quarry and reach toward the airfield, which was to our left, and our left flank. So we helped picking up their wounded and some of their dead and bringing them back, and we saw all of this fire burning, and we got up into there and here are these fifty gallon oil drums. There were probably a hundred of them and they had been strafed and some of them were on fire, a few of them, and it was spooky as heck because the fire was squirting up above them and here they were wondering if they were all going to blow up at once and we had to go right through them and by them and they just kept burning all of the time, and finally as we started up the quarry I was, along with our company commander and our men, had gone up ahead of it so they were up on top and then we came up and I got just up to the quarry when our machine gunners started to come up and I was waiting to get them up on line. As they came up the quarry, some of them got up to us and I was talking as they'd go by, and then Sergeant Cobb was about halfway down in the quarry—it was sort of a trail, but not really a trail—and this explosion. Whether he stepped on a landmine, or one of the little mortar shells came down and hit him, but it fractured his left leg severely and as he fell he fell backwards, and as he was laying there he was calling for me. It still haunts me to this day, and he was hollering, "Gunny, Gunny, Gunny!" And I'd holler down to him and say, "Cobb, I'll be down." But I couldn't go down to him because there is no way to go down to him until I got all of the guns out. So finally they all came by and there was one Mormon boy, Clyde Neidfelt, who was in the machine gunners, and as he came by and I looked in his eyes, you could see... it was pretty scary to walk past a sergeant lying there and they had to leave him. They couldn't do anything with him and they came up and I just went "thumbs up" to him and he went on up on the line and then I went back down to Cobb. By then I had the corps man there and we went down and I held Cobb in my arms and he was just calling, "Gunny, Gunny!" And he was just hugging me real tight and I talked to him and said, "Cobb, you're not too bad, your leg isn't gone. It's fractured but you got this." We had his pants rolled up and the corps man gave him a shot of morphine to kill the pain and then we bandaged him up, got him on a stretcher and got him out of

there. But this little story that I just told you about Sergeant Cobb who was one of my good sergeants—he always did what he was told to do, and he did it well. You didn't have to worry about him. He was just a super individual. Fifty years later we were going back to one of my company reunions and we went through Memphis, Tennessee and he lived in the town just out of Memphis and he was in the hospital. We went to see him and talked to him and met his family and lovely wife, and he had real nice kids. As we were waiting to go into the room to see Cobb his wife was telling us, "You know Gunny, I'm really glad to meet you because all of my life...(and the kids said that) ...all of our lives we've just heard about Gunny Renstrom. Gunny Renstrom would do it this way. Gunny Renstrom did this. Gunny Renstrom did that." And he said, "We just grew up with you a part of our lives because dad was just always talking about what you did and how you handled things. He tried to model his life, and made sure we were following in his footsteps." And he has a great family. They really are super people. When it finally came time for us to go in and see Cobb and he was laying in the bed there and it kind of gives you a sick feeling to see him and everybody was shaking his hand and as I stood looking at him I said, "Cobb, you know what happened fifty years ago today?" And he said, "Yes." And I said, "Cobb, that was something we lived through didn't we? And I was right wasn't I? You got better and you got out of there." He limped all of his life because of it but he got out of there. And as they were all leaving, I put my arms around him and said, "Cobb, remember fifty years ago today I held you in my arms." Tears ran down his eyes and he said, "That's right. That's right Gunny. Thank you Thank you Thank you." So we said goodbye and we left and went to the reunion and then about six months later he passed away. But that is the camaraderie we had in our company, and it still exists. To this day these guys are so loyal and patriotic to the marine corps and to their families, and they've done amazing things, accomplished amazing things all of their lives, but they all are truly marines and they follow that light. So I just wanted to bring that into you because it kind of tells the story of Cobb.

Geoff: So let me ask you... you got all of the guns on the line, you took care of Cobb, then what happened?

Keith: Then I went back up on the hill after we said goodbye to Cobb and got him on the stretcher and got him out of there. I came back up and I had to check to see that the guns were in

the places that we wanted them. We'd already made pre-arrangements to send these sections with the platoons there. We always kept one platoon back in reserve.

Geoff: So were you guys digging foxholes, or was there natural cover?

Keith: We dug what we could, but you couldn't dig much because it was rock you know, and there were pillboxes all over the place that had been blown up and so forth, so we used some of them for our own protection and as we got the guns, well you have to spread the machine guns along so you have them everywhere and our heavy water-cooled guns, we left them behind us down at the quarry. The air-cooled ones are smaller and you can carry them faster and move them when you need them. You don't really need them that much when you're fighting in the daytime. Sometimes you do, but not at much, but at nighttime is when you set these guns up so that they can give you the fire support that you need at nighttime and they don't just go like this with them, they're set in a line and they crossfire like a jigsaw puzzle. If you stand in the middle you'll never get hit, but if you try to walk out, you're going to get hit, and they're always aimed so they are right around your knees. So that's when we had all of those guns and the platoon was in position and so forth, and then we selected... our company commander had figured out where he wanted our C.P. to be, our command post on the radio so we were all kind of clustered around there and then after we had our line, we started to move forward after we had relieved the 3rd Battalion, and then we started to move forward. I had gone down onto the beach and we had gone up probably five or six or seven hundred yards right up the beach and we got clear up there and we got in a fire-fight and a couple of our guys shot Japanese off of the cliff and they fell down. We didn't lose anybody there. There were a couple of dead marines where the 3rd Battalion got to and had to withdraw from and so we brought their bodies back and that night as we started to prepare for the defense of what was going to happen—we thought for sure, and that's why we came ashore early like we did—to prepare for a bonsai charge. This was a perfect spot for it because there was probably about 150 yards from the quarry out to the ocean and it ran all the way along there for a long, long ways. I never did get to where it was around the points there, so they could have come down through there by the hundreds, and we had to have a lot of guns, so our heavy machine guns we left down at the bottom to protect us, where the light guns were up on the hill. Now our machine gun crews were cut in half because half of them were up

on the hill, and half of them were down here. We had infantry, and the bazooka and all this type of stuff ready for that night.

Geoff: So what time of day was this by the time you got settled?

Keith: Probably six o'clock at night.

Geoff: So you'd landed at what time?

Keith: Twelve noon.

Geoff: So you'd been fighting for six hours?

Keith: Yes. All the way from where we did it to the quarry. Now in the quarry there were some dead Japs around there and so we didn't do much that night because we were prepared for the bonsai charge which didn't ever come, and Reverand (?) Watchie, who had built these defenses that we had to take and then was relieved when they brought in the other 13,000 Japanese and now they had about 23,000 there. He was an admiral and they took him off and put in a higher command to run the show. He was the one we had to take. But Reverand Watchie was the one who actually decided that there would be no bonsai charge because they lost too many men. And all through the Pacific it was interesting... they came close to it many times but they never ever cracked the marine lines completely and broke them apart. We were prepared for that and we were able to handle it all, so this was sort of a new experience not to be hit with the bonsai charge the first night because that's your weakest time.

Geoff: So did you have flares going off? Did the navy fire all night?

Keith: Oh ya, all night long. Now if we had a firing mission... if they shot at us, we would always have an asma (?) like this and somebody else had your compass over here so you could get an angle and then with that map you could pretty well tell, but we'd get all of the guns zeroed in, but when a ship is sitting out at sea and it's bobbing up and down in the water and it's turning

as the tide turns, they have to keep their guns, and it's amazing how accurate they can be with those; the destroyers and the cruisers and the battle wagons, but that type of shelling we didn't go through that night from our own shells... it was later.

Geoff: Was it a long night?

Keith: Oh you bet. We always sleep... one guys stays awake and one guy sleeps, then you wake them up every three or four hours and of course if there is fighting going on you stay awake and take a chance and go to sleep.

Geoff: Even when it's your turn to sleep, how well do you sleep?

Keith: You sleep pretty good. You're alert, but you rest except occasionally, and I'll tell you this story... We go down there with Sergeant Vila Ray, but then the next day we started to move, and we moved probably a thousand yards down through a little valley, and up on our sides and when we started down into there this is where I killed the first Japanese on Iwo Jima. We saw this guy starting to crawl out of the ground looking and we were up on the high ground so we were looking down and so about four of us shot him and I didn't want them to shoot that soon, but they did because they were a little nervous you know because I knew there were some more back in there. So then we sent our mortar sections to fire in there and then they started to run out of there and so that was the first shots that I fired, on the quarry. Up until that time we were just getting into the position and we weren't running into any opposition rather than the shellfire coming down on us. So finally when we got to where we were going to be and we waited for our left flank to get caught up, the right flank was o.k. because they were down on the beach and so we were keeping in touch with them as we moved down and we cleaned out several caves and of all of the things to have happen to you, they told us that we didn't have enough troops to go from the beach where we were back to the airfield, but we had to give up the ground that we had taken and come back up to the top of the quarry to set the line and then we stayed there for a couple of days and during that period of time we were shelling the Japanese with our mortars and we were receiving fire and the wounded and dead all of the time. Now this story that I'm going to tell you, the second night was when I took a work party to get the right amount of shells and things

that you want. They'd always get it to me—you need so much of this and so much of that—and one of the premium items was illuminating 60-millimeter mortar shells. That was the one right there so you could light up the line whenever you wanted. We had three mortars spread along the company lines so we could light things up pretty good. And then when we'd light it with our own mortars then the ships that were assigned to us out in the ocean would know where we were and then they would put star-shells over the top to light things up really bright. Well, as I was gathering up guys to take back down to the battalion and to the regiment to get the supplies, as we came down off of the hill, I had probably maybe fifteen men to go back and get the supplies: the water and the food and the ammunition for the next day. And as half of my men gone down the hill and there was PFC Hummer on a stretcher who had been shot, and one eye had been taken out and the bullet had gone like this, across his eye, took his eye out, and across his nose and out, but because of all of the blood running from his head and so forth, he couldn't see out of this left eye, or right eye. I don't remember which one now, but he was just blind and he was on a stretcher and I was right behind him as they were taking him down. We had had four men on the stretcher and this machine gun way up in the hill opened up on us, and two of the stretcher-bearers got hit and Tattersaul from Idaho was shot. The same bullet—his leg was bent like this and the bullet when through his thigh and then through his leg twice, like this and came out down through the calf of his leg. Now he could walk but it hurt. But anyway Hummer was on that stretcher laying right out there so I hollered at Amagoni, and ran out there myself and tried to pull the stretcher back down to get him out of fire and I couldn't pull it through the sand, it just went down like a hoe. And I hollered to Amagoni, "Help me!" He just dropped his rifle and he jumped up and came up there and we grabbed that stretcher and right to the side of us was a hole and we just jumped into that hole. While I was picking up the stretcher, the bullets from the machine gun were just going off all around the ground and Tattersaul who got wounded was laying there and he said, "Gunny, I don't know how in the world you didn't get hit!" He said, "I could feel the sand hitting my pant leg and I could see the bullets hitting the sand all around there." But Amagoni and I just grabbed that stretcher and just jumped down in this big shell hole and slid down while the bullets followed us through the top of the foxhole and they were hitting down about eighteen inches on the back of the foxhole. As long as we were down in the bottom, we were fine. We moved the stretcher around and got it level and then I thought, "What are we going to do? How am I going to get the work party out of here?" I had them half down and half

up scattered all along there. So as I took an inventory of where I could put some fire up on this point where the shells were coming from, I had three M-1's that could get, and I had four carbines in my tommy gun and so we knew where the bullets were coming from and we knew the angle where they were, but we never knew where they were up there. So at the little hollow where they were shooting from, I had one M-1 shoot at the bottom, one M-1 shoot in the middle, and one M-1 shoot at the top and then I had a carbine do the same thing. I had four carbines and then I had the other carbine start at the bottom and shoot all the way around there, and then I would do the same thing. I had them all lined and when I blew my whistle we'd all open fire. The idea behind this was to put enough fire all over and ricochet all over there at the same time, that they'd have to get down and stop shooting at us while my men got out of where they were and got down behind the hill of the quarry where we could reform and go after our ammunition and supplies. Well, when I blew my whistle, I said, "Empty your rifles and then get of there." And they just, "bam bam bam bam bam" all of us all at once all over the place. The guns stopped firing because I'm sure we were ricocheting all around up there and then we all left and when I got down to the bottom of the hill to take inventory, I had two men that were there that I didn't even know I had, so that gave me seventeen, so that was good. So now I had to leave Hummer where he was because we couldn't take him and I told him, "We'll be back to get you." And he said, "O.K., and thanks for saving my life Gunny." The bullets went through the stretcher but he said he could feel them going right past his face. We left and now it was dark and as we started to go the navy lit up this whole place and there I saw myself standing right in the middle of this land mine field and there were little thumbs about the size of my thumb that were sticking up all over the ground out there and I had walked right into the middle of it. Anyone of us could have stepped on one, and had we kept on going, somebody would have stepped on one. Now when a star-shell goes on over, there's one thing that you're trained to do which is don't do anything and stand still and the enemy thinks you're a post or a dead tree or something out there, but if you move, they know you're alive. But I couldn't live by that rule. Now we had the light of the flare and we would see where we were going, and I said, "Follow my tracks." I didn't walk, I sort of dog-trudged right out of there and then I watched every one of those guys come out of there stepping in my tracks as they came through there. I got all of the men out of the completely without losing one, and I'll tell you, had we had kept going one of us—it would had blown a hole bigger than this room—the land mine. Well now we were up

where the coral had come up like this and we were up on the top one and we came all the way back to where our battalion was and we got the water and ammunition and I sent half of them back with that and I took the others back to the regiment to get these 60-millimeter mortar shells because they had only given me about four packages of them and there were three in each package so I needed more than that. So the guys I knew at regiment and division were my friends and I would come in and they'd say, "I got what you need Gunny, here it is." So on Saipan I would always take saki down to the guys and we'd get cases of it and I'd give it to them so they knew I was coming. You'd just trade and barter to get what you need to fight with, and it isn't always available. Most everything is there but the premium items are hard to come by. So you have to know somebody at the right place, and know how to get it and you don't tell anybody, and you just go do it and they'd just give it to you. So that's the camaraderie again that comes out—you've helped guys in the past and they're going to help you now. And that's the marine corps and it still goes on today. And so then my first work party had got back and now we took the rest right down to the beach. Now this time, rather than go inland, we stayed right on the waters edge and walked where the tide came in and walked straight down because there were no mines or anything on that. We got all of those things in that night and took care of that. That was the story. Then the next two nights, we had moved in and there was one pillbox that we couldn't get past and it was really a mean one and the pillboxes were sitting like this so you have to knock out one and then you can roll up the line because now you're coming in on their flank. Well we just couldn't get in there. We had lost too many men trying to take the dang thing so our artillery observer called back and they brought one of the little pack howitzers like the University of Utah uses to shoot, they brought one of those pack howitzers, took it apart, brought it up and while they were bringing it up on the line, we rebuilt a fortification for it and they put the gun in place, pulled the bags down, and the first guy who was sliding that gun into—maybe about a hundred and fifty yards away—he was hit right between the eyes and fell right back and was laying there and the next guy came up and looked off to the side, had the shell in a fired it, and that first shell went right into the slip and "peeeeeew." As soon as it did that, we moved in on that pillbox and we lost several guys from the flank but we'd knocked out the flanks and all of that and now we were in a position to just roll up the line and so that was one of the things they did. The artillery came up there and the bazooka wouldn't reach it, our own rifle grenades wouldn't reach it, but the weapon that came in during the Korean war, the recoil 75

would have done it and that would have been great, but we didn't have that. So as they realize, as time goes on, wars pick up where the last one left off, and when I think of the premature way that we blew up caves compared to the way they do now—they sit back there and give the coordinates to battlewagon and they ship a rocket off and somebody sits there with a little table playing around with it and guys are right into the hole and instead of knocking the cave in, they just blow the mountain down. I've watched that all through Afghanistan, and I've thought what we did was so primitive.

Geoff: So you guys mainly used the pole charges?

Keith: What we did is, if I was going to take a cave like this what we would do is we had a mirror and we would always come up to that cave depending how far. Sometimes you go just a little ways—three or four feet and it's a T and there's a trail that runs off here, and this little place comes out and up on the ground and so forth, so these first little things are just short, but you don't know what's around the corner so the first thing is that two of you go up there and one throws a grenade down this way and one throws a grenade down this way. When that grenade goes off, if there is anybody in there, they are not going to hit so when the dust clears and you put your mirror on the end of your rifle or stick, and it's at an angle so you can tip it and you can look down that trail as far as you can, or you throw a phosphorus grenade down there and so forth. But that's just to make sure there is nobody down there, and then you can set your charges to cave the sides in and blow them down. Well, that's how primitive it was. They'd laugh about the way we did it because now they have weapons and things that can handle that type of thing, so we blew up caves and sealed them off so they couldn't come out behind you.

Geoff: Describe to us what it is like to be in that intense battle of Iwo Jima.

Keith: As we came through the picket line where the little ships were out there to guide us out into our beach where we were coming on Blue Beach One and Blue Beach Two and the division there was a big line. While that's going on the cruisers and the battlewagons are shelling the island and their shelling that and that roar of those nine big guns coming across the ocean—and you can see the water going down as the concussion catches them—while they're still shooting,

the planes are coming in and they're dropping their bombs and napalm and all of this sort of stuff. This is what you're seeing—explosions all over the place, and you can't see through the cloud, and they can't see you, and you can't see them. There's so much dust and dirt and everything else, and when you leave the picket line you're within approximately ten minutes of the beach, and all of the boats are ready and our radioman would get so sick he couldn't even do anything. He always had a big gallon can that he would heave in, but then we'd wash it out for him and give it out for him, but as soon as we'd get on the beach, he was fine. We'd give him his radio, and he'd go on, but now as we came into the beach, and almost to the beach, maybe thirty yards from the beach the shelling from the Japanese is going on and then it lifts because there are no shells in the air to fall, and that's what happened to us. We just missed them hitting us, and we hit the beach and cleared the beach when the next salvo—when we were...that picture of me, the salvo was in the air ready to come down on us. Had we stayed there, we would have been killed. So we cleared the beach and got off of it, and right behind us is when the salvo hit again and all of this dust and blown human bodies and everything, the dead and wounded ones are laying out there... the shells, they get blown up, pieces of them and some places it's a lot worse than others. We were fortunate we got our shell pretty good without having to walk through a lot of that. There were a lot of lungs and guts and stuff like that lying around and you couldn't tell who it belonged to. As soon as we got through that, up on the sand dune or whatever is up on the other level, that sand was so hard to stand in, you'd just wiggle your feet and sink in it like in a green bin. I've never seen anything like it to equal it—it's coarse, but you just wiggle and down you go. Apparently when the big shells would go down in there, they would blow straight up and not have the shrapnel skipping along on the ground, and then it would go up and reach it's highest point and then it would fall, but when it fell down from those points, it wouldn't get going fast enough to hurt you too much. But if it would hit hard on the hard ground then that shrapnel going 350 miles an hour would rip down trees and everything else. But because it would go down so deep, it probably saved a lot of our lives.

Geoff: What was the noise like?

Keith: The noise was beyond anything you could describe, I mean it's so shattering to have one of those big shells go off when you're close to it. It blows dirt all over you, and your head just

feels like it's going like this and your eyes are blurry and sometimes your eyes will bleed and your nose will bleed and you'll spit blood, and your ears will bleed—all that type of stuff. It's kind of a messy thing. Now not at all if you happen to be looking the right way and you're just down underneath the concussion you can live through it, but that concussion, I mean if you if you go through it, it's just unbelievable what the reaction it has on your body. That's why I don't hear well, because of the damage to my ears and so forth.

Geoff: How many guns were going off?

Keith: Probably fifty shells going off in a period of fifty yards, I mean they're just, "boom boom boom boom boom boom." But if you miss it, then you're only fighting the shrapnel. It's like I think I told you at another time when Macy got hit and we were right up from where we were on top and just about a hundred yards down to the right and his legs went out from under him and he just when "vvvvrrroom." And Joclyn says, "Gunny go over and see how bad he's hit." When I went over there, he was down in the bottom of a whole with his pants down and his underclothes and he just kept saying, "And not even any blood, not even any blood." Well, what had happened is he had a cribbage board in his back pocket and a piece of shrapnel about the size of my hand hit him flat like this right on his hip and that was going so hard it knocked his legs out from underneath him and he fell down in this big shell hole. Well while I was working my way over to him, he hurt you know, but there was no blood. And that little cribbage board was... the only way I can describe it is it looked like a board that was laying out on a road and a cement truck had ran over it and just hundreds of little splinters, hundreds. It was no good anymore, but that saved his life.

Geoff: What did it smell like?

Keith: Oh the smell was the coral sulfur of the island which was sulfur with smoke coming out of the ground, you know it was a sulfur smell, and the smell of powder, that's always there, and the smell of the ocean, it's all mixed into one thing. There wasn't any smell of rotten bodies or anything.

Geoff: What about the sun? What about the weather?

Keith: It was a nice day. It wasn't hot or cold. The sun was shining, and when we landed at noon it was a little room. I don't know what the degree was, but it was just a good, pleasant day... a good day for a landing.

Geoff: So if you had to describe Iwo Jima to someone in the future, tell us what it was and what it meant to you.

Keith: Well we called it the "pork chop of the pacific." It looks like a pork chop. It was five miles long and three and a half miles wide and so all I can say is what they say now about Iwo Jima... when I was down on Saipan and Tinian and I met these airmen and twice in my life I had this happen to me. My wife was with me the first time when we were at an airport and this guy came walking past me and I had my little red hat on that said, "Fourth Marine Division" and he just turned around and he came back to me and said, "Were you on Iwo Jima?" And I said, "Yes I was and I'm going to my reunion." Big tears came in his eyes and he was a handsome looking guy and he said, "I owe my life to you marines." And I looked at him and he said, "What you did on Iwo Jima gave me a chance to save my whole crew. We had lost two engines. We had genised(?) all of our guns except one to get rid all of the ammuniton to lighten the plane, hoping that we could get close to Iwo Jima." And they were able to get to Iwo Jima and he was able to save his wounded and save all of his crewmembers.

Geoff: This was one of the B-29 pilots?

Keith: Yes, he was a B-29 pilot. Now that was when my wife was with me. My mistake is that I didn't get his name. You know what happens? You don't realize how important that would have been to get in touch with him now. And then I was in the Houston airport and was going to another reunion in New Orleans and this guy came walking up and he saw that Fourth Marine Division hat and he came like this, a great big guy, handsome, put his arms around me. You think, "Hey, what's going on here brother?" And he said, "You were a marine on Iwo Jima?" And I said, "Yes." And he said, (same story with tears running down his face) "I want to thank

you because I saved my crew. We would have never made it back to Saipan or Tinian or Guam." Now that was two times that happened. But when I was down on Saipan and we went out to dinner and we had one of the greatest dinners right where we had fought and here was this big park and it was crazy to see it and the natives were just really friendly and everybody was getting along. They had this pilot that had been shot down about four minutes before the war ended and he was in the same that I was in and he saw my Fourth Marine Division hat and we got talking and he said, "Gunny, do you know how many airplanes... what you men did on Iwo Jima that we saved?" And I said, "I haven't any idea." He says, "Eleven hundred! Because of what you men did on Iwo Jima, we saved 27,000 air force men. Now that sounds almost unbelievable, but he wrote a book about that but when he was in the prison camp in Japan every Monday morning they would come out, and in front of all of the other prisoners, behead six Americans and he was the commander of the wing so they took him out of this group and put him out there where he had to watch it. They made him watch those executions. We think back here about the cruelty that the German Third Reich had and what Japan had... we think we had cruelty on our side, but it's nothing compared to what they did. So that's one of the things that's hard... I don't have any respect for the Japanese military, but I don't hate the Japanese. I've learned a lot and got that stuff out of my system, but what do you do? I mean this is part of the war.

Geoff: What were your expectations of the battle before you went in?

Keith: Well, everybody hopes that they're going to live through it and make it through but you know darn well that you're not. But you hope it's always going to be somebody else and not you and then all of a sudden you wake up and it's you, and you're wounded and your blood is on the island and you're evacuated. You expect to be killed and the chances are that you will be, but you live with that because you're trained to handle it.

Geoff: Did you ever dream that Iwo Jima would be as tough as it was?

Keith: No, the morning our ship was anchored on the extreme right flank of all of the ships, and there was one smaller ship on our right flank to protect us from submarines, as I was up on the fantail of that, and it was morning, and I had breakfast and I could see all of the action and

shooting going on and you see the big battle wagons, when they would shoot you could see all nine shells in the air at the same time going over and dropping down and this little plane that they shoot off of the cruisers was flying around up there and he got hit and the plane just went zoom zoom zoom until he hit the water. Now I don't know what ever happened to him—whether they got him or what or if he was killed or not, but when I looked at that... Iwo Jima was suppose to be a three day operation, and that's what they expected it to be, but they had no idea that it was dug in so deeply as it was. So as the fighting and the dedication to the Japanese... you have to respect them for what they did because they made it pretty rough for us but we still won because it's just inside of you to win and that's all we knew so we would struggle to upset them and blow them up and kill them. I got to tell you something. Here we're sitting here and we have a war going on in Afghanistan and Iraq, possibly other wars going on, and every single thing that a marine or a soldier or a sailor or an airman has are geared for one purpose only, and that's to be the commitment of a warrior and what we have are modern day warriors doing a great job. All of us live the code of a warrior. Now do you know what the code of a warrior is? The code of the warrior is to kill the enemy, period. There is no shortcut. There is no anything. That's what warriors are for from the beginning of time—to kill the enemy that threatens your liberty and threatens your life and threatens your family, like what's going on over there now. Yes, as a marine we're taught and trained to fight and we know how to fight and win battles, but at the same time, we know some of us are going to die. But if we die, we die doing the thing we love and that's the core of the marines. As we go through this, the Army and Navy and Air Force had their code. And as I think in my lifetime what I have seen and participated in for the one sacred thing of freedom, I'd do it again because freedom is by far one of the greatest things that a nation can have... is to be free, free to die if you have to, and not have them kill you but to be free and have the opportunity to live and express. And as I said goodbye to my wife this morning to come up here, to have that feeling of freedom and know that I was going to be interviewed to tell a part of my life story, I appreciate it, and I appreciate you and everything, so thank you!

Geoff: Is it true that you guys were taught to hate the Japanese?

Keith: We hated them because they did what they did on Wake Island and what they did to the Philippines and what they did to Pearl Harbor. We hated them because they were the enemy and nobody had a school to hate the Japanese. Now with my own life I felt, even though I'm religious and I believe in all of these things and I kept myself straightened out and all of that sort of stuff, I still hated the Japanese to the point that I felt nothing but satisfaction with the first Japanese that I killed. And I would like to explain just why I felt that way. You're sitting in a room like this and all of a sudden you hear something buzzing around it's a fly and it gets in your ear and nostrils and it buzzes your head and you hate him and you just sit there and you can't get the son-of-a-gun and you're sitting there and your roll up a magazine and then he lands on your knee and you wait for your chance and then you go, "whop" and you take him out! But then you hear something else coming. You hear another sound. Now this is a different sound, and this sound means danger, and it's a mosquito and he comes buzzing around and now you have to take him out, but he does the same thing and buzzes your ear and eyes and head and then when you're not looking at him and you try to hit him a few times, you look down at your hand and there he is sitting right there on your hand sucking your blood out and he's getting bigger and bigger and it's your blood and you reach over here and pick up your magazine and you whack him, and what do you feel? You feel darn good inside that you took him out. You tolerated the other one, but this one you thoroughly enjoyed and that's just the way I felt. I can't speak for other Veterans, but that's how I felt, and I had no sympathy for any of the Japanese that I killed. I felt that it was one less that I had to fight and one less to kill one of my men.

Geoff: When you were on the hospital ship, what were the nurses like?

Keith: That was an experience in itself. You know I'd been on an APA. When I got wounded in Tinian they put me in the army hospital over in Saipan, but then when I got from Iwo Jima, and got on that... the smell of perfume was probably the greatest smell I smelled in WWII and when those nurses would walk by, they just smelled heavenly. A lot of us would comment and they'd see them go by and "whheew!" You hadn't seen a woman, you hadn't smelled anything like that and you forget what in the world they even look like and here they were running all over the ship and so forth and I nurse that came and looked at me, you know she was an older nurse, you know and she was pretty hard you know and yet there was this moment of tenderness as they pulled my

lip out and looked down and said, "Well we can't do anything for you now because other guys are worse off than you are." But you talk about nurses and so forth, it was just an experience. Unless you live it, there's no way to talk about it. But it was the smell of the perfume and the soap and all of the body lotions that I remember!

Geoff: Tell us about how you felt when they dropped the atomic bomb.

Keith: I couldn't believe it. I mean when they dropped that bomb... I was aboard the ship going to Treasure Island when the war in Europe ended and now from Tinian where I had fought and Saipan and I'd been in the hospital in Guam and that's when the B-29's had taken off and bombed. It was beyond any kind of an explosion we could comprehend because we had never seen anything like the pictures they showed and so forth of it. It was sort of a feeling of disbelief on my part that they could put together something that could be so destructive as that was, and just in a flash a whole community gone, 300,000 people just gone! So I was relieved because then the word came out that if we landed in Japan, which we expected, they expected that there would be eleven million of them and a million of us killed or wounded, so it was sort of a relief. In San Diego when the war ended, my platoon... we were on duty with everybody and nothing was happening in San Diego out of line the first night and it was so peaceful that they pulled all of our recruits off and then the next night they just tore it apart and we were down there and I mean it was... tipping cars over and breaking windows and boy it was just wild. Sailors and soldiers and marines and air force men... it was just...

Geoff: So did the bomb save your life?

Keith: Oh yes! I feel that the bomb saved our life. There's no question in my whole thing that it had to be done because Japan would have fought it out to the end, and all it took was the Emperor to say, "It's over boys!" And it was over—they stopped fighting, not like they're doing in Iraq and Afghanistan. And it was the same way in Germany when the war was over, it over and they could rebuild their country back again. But in Iraq you have a whole different ballgame and that's a hard one to fight but when you have dedication from people that will die... I was dedicated, but I didn't put myself in a position like they do, to put a bomb on me and walk into a bunch of civilians and blow myself up. I look at those people as cowards and not soldiers. They

are cowards or they wouldn't do what they're doing, and they take advantage of the innocent. When you take advantage of the innocent, then you've got to be wiped out. The only way you can wipe them out is to kill them.