

## **Interview of Eugene England**

Interviewer: Eugene, we're really honored to have you with us today and appreciate you coming down here. Could you just tell us a little about growing up in Plain City and kind of where you were when you first heard of Pearl Harbor and kind of what was going through your mind?

Eugene England: Yes, I grew up in Plain City, a little community of 600 people at that time, and of course, the war was somewhat removed from that. By the time Pearl Harbor came along, I was married and we were living in Pismo Beach, California on December 7th when the attack was made on our country in Pearl Harbor and at that time. There was a lot of anxiety along the west coast wondering when the Japanese were going to hit the Western part of our country. It was a time of anxiety. We didn't know what was going to happen. It was a time that I think we all realized we'd been offended as a nation and we were going to retaliate, and that certainly happened.

Interviewer: And then, tell us about a little about your induction and were you drafted or did you volunteer?

Eugene England: As I mentioned, we had one child at that time. I was deferred for some time, and then we went down to San Luis Obispo, California where a lot of the Utah troops were training. My father in law was a colonel. He was the commanding officer down in Spanish Fork, Utah. We went down there to visit them and I took a visit with the post exchange there and I managed the post exchange there for about a year at that camp. Then we came back to Utah and I was drafted after that.

Interviewer: Where did you go for basic training?

Eugene England: We went to camp -- Texas.

Interviewer: That's all right.

Eugene England: That's funny, I can't even think of that camp now.

Interviewer: That's all right, I'm the same way. But you went to Texas and then went to basic training there.

Eugene England: It was infantry that we were inducted into, so we went through the basic training. The need for men on the battlefield seemed to be pretty strong at that time, so we went through our basic training and I was shipped out with a five day delay in route going to Fort Ord, California. I had my wife and my little boy with me, and so we stopped here in Utah for two or three days, and then went on to Fort Ord, California. We were shipped out of there then well, we went to Hawaii and then on to Saipan. Saipan at that time was pretty much secured. The plans were being made for the invasion of Okinawa. So it was on Saipan where we, that's where I was. I was a replacement. We were trainees that had been sent out and we were going to be filling the need where ever it was needed. I was put in the 77th Infantry Division. I joined them there at Saipan and we went in for the invasion of Okinawa.

Interviewer: Was it a little unusual -- imagine, to be a father at that time? Were you roughly the same age as everybody or were you a little bit older?

Eugene England: I was a little older. I was four or five years older than most of the soldiers I was fighting with. However, there were a few that were. There was one of the men that I fought with, here from Salt Lake, that's my same age. I'm 88 years old. I just visited with him here a

few nights ago. We were together there and we were both the same age. He'd been a railroader and was, they didn't draft him as early as they would have done because he was needed here.

Interviewer: When you first shipped out and went to Hawaii, how long were you in Hawaii?

Eugene England: A few days.

Interviewer: Just a few days?

Eugene England: Yeah, they were anxious to get us over there.

Interviewer: Then you went to Saipan, which was already secured.

Eugene England: Yeah, there were still snipers there, but, yeah, the actual battle was pretty much over there.

Interviewer: Then you trained in Saipan for invasion of Okinawa and went straight from there to that, Okinawa?

Eugene England: We went in and landed at Okinawa.

Interviewer: All right, take us, from when you left Saipan, tell us a little bit about the ship that you went over on, how long it took you to get there, what the initial invasion was like, and what was going through your mind.

Eugene England: Well, the, the night that we left Saipan, we were on orders for the next morning. There came an announcement over the loud speaker that all LDS men, there was going to be a testimony meeting here tonight at 7:00. We turned out there were, I guess, maybe 20 LDS men that were in the division, so we assembled there, and had a testimony meeting prior to going. Of course, we went in on these LSI -- I think they call them, Landing Craft Infantry --

that went into the beach and it was a bloody mess, is what it was. The six-by-sixers were on the beach and they were chewing up. It was mud, six inches deep and it was, it was a mess. We actually were not the first to get there. There were trucks on the beach and they established a beachhead when we got there. So from then on, it was just day-to-day battle. The campaign didn't last, I don't remember just how many days it was. The plan was that they would put three divisions online on Okinawa. It's kind of a rectangular island, actually. The plan was to put three divisions across the island and clean the island as we went, leaving no snipers or anyone behind. The plan further said that anything that moved at night was the enemy, that we would stay dug in, and if anything moved, you could shoot. Then every night, there were flares being shot up and, of course, as a thing moved from one end to the other, there was a lot of effort on the Japanese part to penetrate our lines and get back through during the night -- there was lot of death. A lot of Japanese bodies around in that climate, two or three days, and they didn't take care of their dead. They couldn't, I guess. They were being pushed so hard that it, you know, the US Armies, they take care of their dead, but the Japanese didn't at that time. We had to do a lot of that because we were pushing on through. Of course, this campaign moved on down to what was called Shuri Ridge. It was also called the escarpment. I think. It was a high rocky ridge that raised up on the island, and it was well fortified by the Japanese. They were dug in, so as the -- there was an Army division on the left, an Army division on the right, and the Marines in the center. As we moved down this island, we came to this escarpment and it shut it down. We couldn't penetrate it, and so the lines were held up. So after some delay, it was determined that they would change the policy and do a pre-dawn attack. It turned out the company that I was in, Company E, 307th, was called along with another company to move out ahead of our lines and try to knock out this emplacement. As it turns out, we departed. Well, we got up at 2:30 in the

morning and at 3:00 we were moving out through our lines. By the time we got to what was our destination, it was hard to determine where exactly, what was the place we wanted to be. By the time we got there and were digging in, daylight was breaking and the Japanese were taken by complete surprise. We were there and they didn't know we were there. When daylight broke, they knew we were there. We were covered from all directions. The fire was -- we were dug in in fox holes and, it was tough going. The loss of life that was -- it 72 hours before our troops were able to get up to us. At that time, of course, we'd had the, I think the count was about 129 that went up and 27 came back. We were given a citation that this effort wasn't in vain, that the loss of life had some kind of accountability, that the breaking through of that ridge was accountable for us being able to complete the campaign and so on.

Interviewer: Now, as, you were a PFC at the time and what were your main duties. Did you have any main duties in your squad?

Eugene England: We had an M-1 rifle and grenades and we were out there to try to do the job.

Interviewer: Okay, so at 2:30 in the morning, you moved out, and what time was it that you got in, and then I guess you dug a fox hole where you--

Eugene England: Yes, as soon as we got on site, that was the first thing was to get protection because they were at a higher elevation than we were. In fact, they were lobbing mortars down that were landing in some of the holes with us. So it was a very difficult situation to break through and be able to accomplish what we were there to do.

Interviewer: And during that time, is that the time that, when you got the Bronze Star that you--

Eugene England: Yes, we were, we were in kind of a semi-circle, our squad, probably 12 or 15 men, and we were dug in, I suppose, maybe 75 yards around this thing. There was a slight ridge behind us, but it didn't give us much cover. We found out that the small arms fire would penetrate pretty close to the ground. This one soldier -- the 77th Infantry Division was a New Jersey division, and so most of the people that were in the unit when I got there were from New Jersey and they were quite clannish. They were generally Italian descent, and our sergeant was one of the Italian fellows. His name was Batisti. We were in this circle and one of the men, I don't know how it happened, he got out and got hit and was out laying between us, these fox holes, he was out in the middle. He was knocked down and couldn't move and he was yelling, "Batisti, Batisti, come and get me." Well, Batisti wouldn't come and get him, and nobody else seemed to want to do it But I, for some reason, I went out and I had to go out on my belly and we knew that the small arms fire was coming in there close to the ground and I was able to go out and get him and drag him back into my hole. Of course, the ironic thing about it was that Batisti was the one that put me in for the Bronze Star. He had refused to do it himself.

Interviewer: When you are in battle like that in a situation that way, and you just -- you risked your life above and beyond what your other comrades were doing, can you remember kind of the thoughts going through your mind? Here goes a father with a child crawling out of his fox hole to go risk your life to help another soldier.

Eugene England: It's a funny thing what happens to you in combat. You're scared to death, but it doesn't seem to interfere with your ability to operate. It seems you can do more. You're stronger and you're, I guess, the adrenaline is running to where you just seem to be able to do things. I don't know, it was, the man was out there. He needed to get back in and I brought him into my hole and he was there until the medics could finally get up to him. I don't remember exactly, this

was a 72 hour overall. Thing that happened -- I don't remember at what point in that time that this happened. Anyway, it was something you sure don't want to be able to be involved in, but it happened anyway.

Interviewer: We read about a lot of Japanese holed up in caves on Iwo Jima. In this particular mission, were they in caves shooting down at you?

Eugene England: Yes. They, they did that all over the Pacific, I guess. They would put their emplacements in and then they could wheel them out of some kind of a little tunnel, you know. They were hard to combat in that regard. Of course, the amazing thing about it is that the report that I have from, on the record from the 77th Infantry Division, is that, for every 77th man that was killed in that campaign, there were 22 Japanese died. You know, actually, we didn't take very many prisoners. I don't know. We just, we didn't have a way to handle it. There was nothing, we were there to fight and they were fighting and the prisoners weren't considered, I guess.

Interviewer: So, how many hours did that battle last and what was the final resolution? Did you get relieved by reinforcements?

Eugene England: Yes. Our troops got up to us within 72 hours. We were pretty short on food and ammunition and everything else by the time they got there, and it was a relief, I'll tell you, that they were able to make it and get there. Strangely enough, it seemed like from then on, of course, the battle went on and you were dug in always, and when these flares would go up in the middle of the night, you didn't do any sleeping. You were protecting yourself because you didn't know where they were coming from. I remember one morning, it was just starting to break day and we were dug in a hill down off from us. I looked out there and here came a Japanese soldier

heading right for us running right into us and he was maybe, I don't know, maybe 50 yards away. I threw a grenade and that was the end of that. It stopped him. It's hard to believe that in that campaign, our division lost over 2,200 men that were -- well, never came home -- and I think about 6,700 were wounded. More than were emotionally wounded, you know. That real estate was awfully costly, but it had to be done. Okinawa was an awfully important thing in the progress to get into Japan. After that campaign was finished, we were taken back to Cebu in the Philippine Islands to train for the invasion of Japan. It was at that time that the bombs were dropped on Japan and the thing was over, except we went in as occupation troops.

Interviewer: Let's go back to that. When you were relieved and the reinforcements came in, and there were only 27 of your men left, were you able to just retreat and go back and rest or what exactly happened after that?

Eugene England: (Laughter) There wasn't any nice beds or anything. There was no rest and recuperation. What you did, we ate the best food that they had available. They fed us that and we were back in battle again. There was just no place to get away from it.

Interviewer: So you had to be given another assignment.

Eugene England: Yes, well, it was the progress to try to, as we moved. Yeah.

Interviewer: How long did that battle for Okinawa take you? Do you recall that?

Eugene England: I can't remember for sure, I'm thinking maybe it was 30 to 40 days, something like that.

Interviewer: My thought was 58 or something.

Eugene England: It might be longer, it seemed like forever.

Interviewer: After surviving that tough of a situation, what was it like mentally? I can't imagine having to go immediately right back into battle again.

Eugene England: It's funny what the mentality is, that you don't have options. We're there and you better protect yourself and you better be doing what your there to do. Of course, it was, I think the mentality of the troops was always -- I don't remember anybody breaking down or, you know, saying I can't do it. You just did it. You soon become aware that you don't have options. You're there and you better protect yourself and you better do what you're assigned to do. Of course, I think the overriding thing was, again, the fact that we had been attacked, that we were, we were the honorable people. We were retaliating for a deed that was, you know, dastardly.

Interviewer: How many days were you on Okinawa?

Eugene England: Well, as soon, I think as soon as the campaign was over, and I'm saying within a month, a month and a half, then we were moved right out.

Interviewer: You went out on a landing barge, got back on a boat, a ship?

Eugene England: Yeah. They had these, again, we had these LCI's and loaded on those and went to Cebu.

Interviewer: Did you never see any of the local Japanese population on Okinawa? We hear reports they jumped off of cliffs and stuff like that. Did you ever see any of that?

Eugene England: No. In fact, I didn't see any Japanese people, none -- no families, no nothing, except soldiers. Everyone was in uniform that I saw.

Interviewer: Did you ever suffer through a Bonzai charge where they almost were just committing suicide and attacking American troops?

Eugene England: In this regard that, when, as we moved down the island and they were pushed and pushed, and there was, I mentioned, they were trying to penetrate our lines to get behind us. That turned out to be somewhat of the same kind of a charge. As they ran into us, they knew the chance of getting through was nil, but they kept trying.

Interviewer: When you left Okinawa, then you went straight to the Philippines, and where were you when you heard that the--

Eugene England: We were in a camp in the Philippines. We were in training there and that was a kind of a different experience, too. We were there on the Island of Cebu and one day, my brother showed up. He was in the Air Force, and he was stationed on Mendenow, or some other island, but he was able to get a pass. We had a way of communicating where we were. So we, you know, of course our letters were all monitored, but we had worked out a deal where we could tell each other where we were.

Interviewer: A little code system.

Eugene England: Yeah. Actually, it was very simple. We just changed my middle name, middle initial. And when I put C. E. B., he knew I was on Cebu. So he came up there and we spent a week together there while we were in training. I hadn't seen him for three years. In fact, he brought me a mattress, the Air Force had all kinds of good things, and I think I was the only man in the division that had a mattress on his bed. They were sleeping on these canvass cots.

Interviewer: So, your brother flew in, located your unit?

Eugene England: He knew what unit I was in, and when he got the code from me, he knew it was Cebu, so he went in inquiring as a 77th over on that island and where are they and he found his way to me.

Interviewer: And brought you a mattress, that's interesting. Well, then, tell us about your thoughts when you heard that the war was over.

Eugene England: I guess maybe prior to that, was the dropping of this bomb. You know, we were so relieved. We knew that the invasion of Japan was going to be a terrible thing. When we understood that it was over as far as -- it was a terrific relief we were free of that. Of course, when the surrender came, well, yes, it was wonderful.

Interviewer: You were in the Philippines on Cebu?

Eugene England: Yeah. And we went into the Island of Hokkaidō, that's a northern Japanese island. Actually, we were in the city of Sapporo, where the Olympics were held over there. We spent that fall and winter there in Sapporo, and it was a lot like home here -- a lot of snow. In fact, we had 56 inches of snow on the level of the barracks we were in.

Interviewer: What, how were you treated by the Japanese people?

Eugene England: As we went into the island, as we unloaded at the dock, these people were, they were bowing. They were totally submissive. It didn't take long until we were friends and it became apparent, you know, that the average person has very little to do with a country going to war. These people, they were victimized and as a matter of fact. The church had had a mission there in Sapporo and they had discontinued it 20 years before. When we found this group that the missionaries had converted, they left a little organ there and they left the song books that

were translated into Japanese. So we started meeting with these people and they would, we'd sing the songs. They'd sing Japanese, we'd sing English. There were still, in fact, the English teacher in the high school had been a convert that had stayed to the church and so it was a pretty good experience there.

Interviewer: So the soldiers could go to the in the city at night and go to restaurants?

Eugene England: Sure.

Interviewer: And you were welcomed?

Eugene England: Yeah, they had shows and different things and GI's, as you know, are generous. They were giving the kids candy and it soon became quite a friendly thing.

Interviewer: And, how long were you in Sapporo?

Eugene England: I think from about September maybe through to February. Then they moved the high point men down to Shinagawa to be shipped out back to the states and I was taken down there.

Interviewer: And did Sapporo have much damage from the incendiary bombs?

Eugene England: No.

Interviewer: That was one of the cities that was kind of spared?

Eugene England: I guess, yeah.

Interviewer: Elizabeth, have you got any?

Elizabeth: I want to skip back to the 72 hours in the fox hole. Can you describe the environment as far as -- was it cold and wet and hot and muggy, bugs?

Eugene England: As I recall I don't believe we had, we may have had a little rain, but we didn't have pouring rain. I don't remember having trouble with water in the hole with us at that time. I don't think the weather was, I don't think it was unpleasant. I know it wasn't cold. It tended more to the warm side.

Interviewer: And how about your food?

Eugene England: Well, we had some K-rations with us, and that was all we had there. Of course, you have to have food, but that's probably way down on the list as far as if you can get something to sustain yourself. You're not under those conditions. The worry of the war is way ahead of the food.

Interviewer: I imagine.

Elizabeth: Were you constantly shooting in those 72 hours?

Eugene England: Well, of course, no one can stay alert 24 hours, for 72 hours. There has to be some relief. You would, your fox hole buddy would say, "Well, take a break for a minute." But the minute a flare went up and someone was moving out there, you were back on it again because you just couldn't -- we never knew when we'd been over run, you know.

Interviewer: How much longer could you have lasted if that--

Eugene England: It wouldn't have been long.

Interviewer: --he reserve. Because I guess you were low on food and ammunition both.

Eugene England: Yeah.

Interviewer: Well, that's quite an experience. So after Sapporo, then you shipped back down to, where did you say?

Eugene England: I think it was Shinagawa, I believe, five stops out from Tokyo. They had an assembly of people that were going to be sent home, so I went down there and I was there for maybe a week or two before I was shipped out back home.

Interviewer: Tell us about the voyage going back.

Eugene England: You know, strangely enough, I don't remember anything about it.

Interviewer: You went into San Francisco, didn't you, I imagine?

Eugene England: Yes, let's see, now. Yeah, we shipped out of there and then came back to there, I'm trying think. Yeah, it was the Fort Ord area. I think that's where we came back to again, yes. I remember -- that's one thing I remember about coming home -- we were in these barracks in Fort Ord waiting to be shipped home. The weather was quite cool that night and I remember some of these guys that went out and got all drunk. They were celebrating being home, and one of them came in and passed out on the floor and I could hear this little, sounded like a dog whimpering. The next morning, there was a soldier, filthy on the floor, but he had a good time when he got back to the USA.

Interviewer: You don't remember seeing the Golden Gate Bridge for the first time? You might have been a night.

Eugene England: Yeah, I don't have a recollection of any of that.

Interviewer: There was a sign there saying, welcome home? Well done?

Eugene England: Yes, I do remember. When we got to the dock, yes, there were people there to welcome us home, yes.

Interviewer: Well, that's a real interesting story and we appreciate you coming here and telling us and we honor your service and thank you very much for your service to our country.

Elizabeth: Is there anything we've missed that you want to tell us about?

Interviewer: Is there any, any other close calls or hair raising experiences that you can remember?

Eugene England: Not that I, you know, when you come home, people want to hear the story. They all wanted you to talk about it, and I never felt like doing that.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Eugene England: In fact, I haven't done it. I haven't talked about it. It was something that I didn't want to re-live necessarily. It's been a long time and -- it's pretty well understood that we're a passing group. I understood there are a thousand a day going down.

Interviewer: Well, I think that's about right. So you didn't talk about it to your kids or--

Eugene England: No, I really haven't. I had six sons.

Interviewer: Six boys, huh?

Eugene England: And it's been very minimal that I've--

Interviewer: Ever discussed it?

Eugene England: I've never gone into the details with them. Here recently, they've asked me if they could get on record something about it, so we've had a few meetings and they're trying to get a, not only the record of what I did in the war, but in the company and so on. So we do that every month or two and they're recording those things.

Interviewer: Are you still actively working at the age of 88?

Eugene England: Yes, I'm in the office every day. As I mentioned, I had six sons. We lost one son here about 12 years ago. He was diabetic and his kidneys finally failed, but he worked for the company all his life till he was 44 years old and did us a great job. But my sons, we didn't -- my brother and I, well, my dad started the company, but my brother and I worked together all our life in the company. We brought his family out here about two years ago because he had daughters and we had sons. We just kind of seemed more sensible that we'd buy the company. I still hold the title of President, but my sons -- I didn't really ever understand when they were running it. It was so automatic and it was just a transition that was never any bumps to it at all. They learned the business from the ground up. They took over and they're great men. They're professional. The industry recognizes them for being what they are.

Interviewer: That's good.

Eugene England: So it's been a great reward.

Interviewer: What are your thoughts in general about World War II and the sacrifices made and about your generation that served?

Eugene England: Well, I guess maybe our country was maybe not as sophisticated as it is today. I don't know that a lot of the things that seem to be tearing us apart hadn't come along at that

time. I think, when that attack came against us, it was almost 100 percent, "Hey, we're ready to serve and take care of this." The world has changed, I guess, since then, but I was proud to be part of that group of people. Now, when you start thinking about the plans that were done to take over Japan, to overcome, that we had to have that real estate and if it took whatever loss of life was required to gain that foothold, we did it. I think we needed to do it. I think it was, you know, the history of what our country has done since then indicates that we are kind of an unusual group of people here. I am proud to be an American.

Interviewer: If you were to talk to some future generations, high school or somebody that might be viewing this, what kind of message would you like to impart to future generations that may be viewing this interview?

Eugene England: I'd kind of like to see them a little bit more knowledgeable about what brought this country to what it is today. Now, maybe that's too much to expect. Maybe the fact that they don't know who we fought in World War II, some of them can't answer that question, that seems to me that if you're an American, you would want to know more about the history of the country than that. Of course, there is one good thing about it, you know, weaponry has become more ferocious at the time, but in a way, it saves lives. I just heard about some kind of a device they have that can render a person inactive as far as coming against you, just by a ray or something. What a giant leap forward that is if we can get away from the bloodshed and settle our disputes in a better way. I think our generation, you know, we continually have better minds think as the kids -- I learn their computer world and they're just smarter than we were. I hope that brings out a better world ahead.

Interviewer: What advice would you give somebody in the future?

Eugene England: I think the old principles that the establishment always had: honesty, integrity, fairness to everyone. I think those are the things that make life good.

Interviewer: Well, Eugene, thank you so much for coming down today. Elizabeth, have you got any?

Elizabeth: Now, that was very good.

End of recording.