



Max Gollaher

United States Navy

Quartermaster

Pacific Theater

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Interviewer:
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Rick: Max, we're glad to have you with us today we'd like to have you just tell us your name and your rank, where you served and a little about you're joining up.

Max: Well, I'm from Tooele Utah and the morning that we got a notice to report to go into some induction, we still had a choice at that time and it was graduation so all of us boys talked of course the war had just broke out. I went down on a Sunday to milk the cow, we had a single cow and my brother-in-law came out and said "*you better get your gun, the Japanese are coming*" and that was my first knowledge of the Japanese war because they'd just bombed Pearl Harbor it was on a Sunday morning. So I heard and later on at school we found out what happened and we went in. So we had a choice and I chose...

Rick: So you were a senior in High School at that time?

Max: Yes and we got our greetings in the mail the same day that we were practicing to graduate, we were practicing our marching for the graduation exercises and all of us went kind of our separate ways, we just went right out of high school right into the military service. All of us, some went in the air force of course in all different months.

Rick: Did you choose the Navy?

Max: I chose the Navy.

Rick: So tell us about what happened right after you joined up and how did you eventually get over seas?

Max: Well I joined up and of course they ended up having us come to Salt Lake and went by train up to Farregut Idaho up in the pan-handle of Idaho up near Coeur d'Alene and they had a place they'd cleared out to haul the timber and they had a place called '*Farregut Idaho*' it was named after Admiral Farregut and that's where we took our basic training – our boot camp as the navy calls it. We did that there and was up there about six weeks and came home on a 30-day

leave and I was lucky I liked to hunt and I came home towards October so I got to hunt when I came home. So there was that period and of course we had to come back of course after 30 days and then they shipped us direct and I was shipped direct to...I would take tests and so forth in boot camp to see what you're adapted for and so forth. I guess we didn't know it because we were sent to Great Lakes Naval Training Station out of Chicago it's right on the lake – basic in there. It's a permanent base, all brick buildings and that was part of the base and right there for 3 or 4 months going to school to do that and what I was training for – they put me in (and I didn't have a choice in this either once you were in) they put us in what's called '*The Quarter Master*'. We were all Quarter Masters in the barracks where we were at. A Quarter Master in the Navy has a wheel – it's on the right hand side by the way and it's like a wheel. He steers the ship, he does navigation, he steers the ship and he's an apprentice working up and then later he uses navigation and is primarily navigational.

Rick: So in the Army a Quarter Master is a supply sergeant but in the Navy it's more navigation.

Max: It was all navigation, no supply.

Rick: Well then when you got shipped over seas did you know exactly where you were headed or what your assignment was?

Max: Well from Chicago we finished that up in November, December, January and February so about the first of March we were sent to Little Creek Virginia on the Chesapeake Bay and there we were assigned to the LCC. That's where we got our first choice; we lived in old Quonset huts that were rounded.

Rick: What's the LCC?

Max: The LCC stands for '*Landing Craft Control*'. If you hear me say LCV Pierce or whatever, LC is always '*landing craft*' and the other has another connotation to it.

Rick: You were assigned to be on landing craft that went in on an invasion before the main body of invaders.

Max: We were the first wave. We practiced that at Little Creek Virginia at the Chesapeake Bay and we went out and made landings on Chesapeake Bay so we knew our maneuvers and from there we got through and then went across country on a train for five days, no beds, you had to sit up for five days, sleep sitting up and went to San Diego California. We went from there out to Coronado California and that's where we went and we were already set up and part of the crews went up to...they split the crews, we were put into crews in Little Creek Virginia and then they split part of us and some went to Portland Oregon, that's where our boat was made that I was on. Then they brought it down and we all met at San Diego and we went through maneuvers in San Diego. We would practice on the beach there at San Diego and then it was time for us to be shipped overseas.

Rick: Did you know at the time that you would be leading these invasions?

Max: I didn't know it until we got into doing it and what can you say, you can't tell Uncle Sam you wont do it. You didn't have much choice.

Rick: And then you went overseas on a troop ship?

Max: No, they would send us on anything, I went over on the USS Nehana Bay, it was a small aircraft carrier, one of those that they converted – a small one. We slept on the steel deck and the hangar deck which is the main decks where the planes take off and down below they have an elevator to drop the plane down at the time. That's where they store the planes – the next deck down. We slept underneath the planes at night. We were about four or some odd days going over to Hawaii.

Rick: And from Hawaii you went to where?

Max: It was Waipeli Amphibious Base in Hawaii and then we went on some more there – when I say more that’s two weeks and more, not a long time. From there we then picked up the ship that’s where I got on. I was assigned to my crew. There were 12 of us enlisted men and two officers both Hansen’s – the 90 day wonders they called them at World War II. We were made up then and that’s where we would get together everybody and we were assigned to our ship the USS Monrovia, named after Monrovia California. It was an APA – an APA stands for ‘*amphibious personnel attack*’ and they would see some ships with AKA on them and they’d use them for the same purpose and that’s ‘*amphibious cargo attack*’ and one carries more cargo and less soldiers and marines and ours took heavy soldiers and marines and less cargo.

Rick: Max you participated in basically 6 invasions and you were in either the first wave or you went in before the first wave on some of those, do you want to tell us about those?

Max: Originally they didn’t have a UDT teams that’s ‘*unwanted demolition teams*’, they hadn’t needed them there and so as a result in the earlier landings during the war prior to my being out there (the early ones) they would have trouble. If you know the South Pacific they have among those islands out there they have shells underneath the water and so depending on high tide or low tide and the choral reefs would come in and what would happen, these small boats – that’s the LCVP’s (the land craft vehicle personnel) that you’ve all seen in the movies where the front end drops down, well they come in and if they hit the shoal then the next wake turns them sideways and then the next wake tips them upside down. So they had a lot of those wrecks dumping about 25 servicemen – marines or soldiers in one of those LCVP’s (that’s what we led into the beach), and so they had to get something else so they started blowing up the choral reefs three days before the invasion. So I got hooked up with that and we did that at first. We were not a demolition team they just had us in other words do our own – at first just the staffing did it. We blew it up and then what they did was – you had the Point A to Point B and you couldn’t see underwater where it’s blown up so that they could go clear to the sandy beach with the LCVP’s like they should so we blew them up then they put a buoy one one end and one on the other and it was set to go tick tick tick on the opening morning of the invasion all preset.

Rick: Well now that had to be very dangerous because I imagine the enemy was on the island and you guys were coming in and trying to blow up those coral reefs – tell us about some of those experiences.

Max: Well that's the first time that I got hurt. They kept shooting at us and I happened to be assigned with an officer named Stan Case he's a fellow as big as I am and we were working together, you worked in twos and they took us there where we'd work and then they'd come to pick us up. You've seen some of them perhaps in war pictures where the rubber craft with a motor on behind it comes real fast and you're in the water and you wheel over and throw your arm up and there's a fellow in there (not running the boat, he's sitting there kneeling down) he hooks the ringer on you're thing and you do a flip and in the boat you go on the run because if you stop they'd shoot you a lot more. So that happened but in the meantime while I was there they were shooting a shot and I don't know whether it was a mortar or not but the first thing I knew (like the guy says the first thing I knew I didn't know anything) I was trying to pass out because it didn't hit me direct it hit to the side of me but the concussion with the ocean water busted my eardrums – it threw the water in so hard that it busted clear through my eardrum. I tell people that that's why I'm a little bit hard of hearing – that was the left side of my head and so I have been hard of hearing because of that and we did this but then finally the invader guys or underwater demolition teams do it later on.

Rick: What were the islands? Can you name the islands?

Max: Do mean that we were on?

Rick: Yes.

Max: Well the island of Guam, there's Guam, Tinian and Saipan and I was at Saipan and Guam both. That was the first two then the two invasions in the Philippines one when we brought MacArthur in originally and the first one that we landed at Leyte. That was on the east side and then the next invasion was around – you went around through what's called the Saragor Strait and that's in the South China Sea and come in from there. What the government did was (when

you picture the Philippines it's long and narrow) so they cut them off right in the middle. The two forces came together and that was the idea behind it.

Rick: So when you were in combat I know you had a lot of harrowing experiences, tell us about some of the most life threatening experiences that you had in those invasions.

Max: Well probably one direct relation was at Saipan when we were just about into the beach with the first wave with the LCVP's we were only out there about 50 yards off the beach and the Japanese were shelling us real heavy and one of the Japanese made a good shot and he hit an LCVP dead center and there was about 25 soldiers or sailors in those LCVP's fully equipped – they had everything, their backpacks and their guns and it hit dead center and they just went 'Wham'. We had to finish taking the rest in and ignore it and I don't know whether he's a sailor but there's a sailor that takes his boats in he's called a "coxswain" and they or he got killed. We had to take them on in and I don't know what ever happened but it killed – I saw some arms and legs flying and it flew and that's probably the closest to see about 25 people get killed all at once.

Rick: How did you cope seeing all of those marines and sailors get killed and all of that combat that you saw – what did you use to go on the next day and to cope with that kind of danger?

Max: Well, I'll have to give you an experience. First of all let me tell you what some of them were. When we got into the beach we were killing Japanese and Japanese were killing Americans so you had both dead people around so about the third day (it depended on the resistance, how far they pushed the Japanese back) one day they brought in big bulldozers right out there on the ships. Just big bulldozers with big blades at least about 8 feet wide and they would dig a ways in any flat place they could and up off away from there they sat up high enough and they'd dig then by just digging down in and out the other side and then turn around and dig down and up the other side so we were just pushing dirt on both ends. Then you get the dead people you're picking up and pull the dog tag off of them and throw them crosswise in the caterpillar with the blade that got the dirt. We dug two holes, they separated them a long ways and we through the Japanese in one and of course the Americans in the other at the beach. And this of course happened after we got all of the waves in the beach. We'd take the first wave in –

different at each invasion and then we'd go back and pick up another wave that was out there waiting and bring them in and each time...of course with the first wave the further back you are the better off you are for living. The first wave gets the brunt of it; the second wave is a little less and less on down.

Rick: And you were on the first wave on basically six different invasions?

Max: Six different times, yes the first wave and then sometimes second and sometimes third and about the third wave there several but mostly first. The first wave mostly and sometimes second and third.

Rick: At night when you were sleeping and thinking about the next day's invasion did you have a lot of fear or what was going through your mind?

Max: You know if you don't have some humor in life why that's the best way that I've tried to get over those type of things – not thinking about them. I was young and it didn't bother me too much. It's bothered me more since I've been older actually it's bothered me more than when I was younger. I'll give you an example, when we finished one invasion we're coming back and pulling the anchor on our USS Monrovia and coming out which is sitting out there about 3 to 5 miles out there in the water, well there were dead marines and they couldn't find anymore space in there where they bulldozed to put them in they had too many of them (this was at Siapan it think it was) so they put the dead people in the LCVP's that the sailors were shuttling back and forth and of course those LCVP boats drop down and they carry personnel and after they get all the personnel in they carried then supplies, food, ammunition of all that type and then they'd unload all the supplies. Now they come in so they were doing this type of thing and they said "*we've got too many dead in here, we can't find anymore space*" so they said, "*the ship is going out so we're taking...*" I know it's cruel to say this but they called it "*feeding the fish*" dumping the dead ones over and we had a little service for them on the fantail of the ship and dump them over. They'd bring them back in a cargo net. They loaded them by hand on the beach of course when they come on the ship they dropped the cargo net and loaded them and reloaded them in a cargo net and lift them up in the cargo net squares of rope that's approximately 10 to 12 inches

(I'm just guessing about 10 to 12 inch squares) and so the people were in there and we had one come back. We had come back, the LCC had come back and we had just gotten back there and here came one of the kids with LCVP's with a load of dead marines and he yelled for the boom to come down to hook on to it and it did and he brought it up and they just swung them over on the deck in the net with the rope and that. But then he said, "*bring the boom back down*" and "*what for*" and he said, "*I've got a bucket here*"; "*well what do you got in it*"? Well he said "*one of those Gyrynes (the sailors called the marines the gyrynes) went in there and got excited and lost his head*" and he actually had the head of a marine in the bucket. But he said, you see he was trying to pass it off as a joke by saying he'd lost his head, he meant like losing your temper or so forth.

Rick: You mentioned earlier that you had several servicemen die in your arms.

Max: I've had three of them.

Rick: Could you tell us about that?

Max: I couldn't even tell you who they were, I don't know what religion they belong to, I don't know where they were from because you don't have time to do that. One of them I recall hit me with a question as he was dying and I've asked and I've sprung it on people many times. He'd been shot pretty heavy, just one shot I don't know area in the thoracic part of the body between your legs and your neck and he was bleeding and he was frantic and he says "*I know I'm gonna die, I know I'm gonna, where am I gonna go, where am I gonna go*"? And I held him in my arms and this was on the beach and was down around behind a rock and I tried to tell him "*you're going to go back to where you came from so if God had sent you we're all going to go there, all of us*" and I said "*you'll get rewards for what you did good on this earth and I guess for what we do bad we'll have to account for*" and with that he just '*hmmmm*' and that was it that's all he got out. I only had about 30 to 60 seconds to talk to him and I recall that question '*where am I going to go*' and I knew I had about one minute and what are you going to say? You don't know what religion, you don't know anything about the boy, where he was from...he

was a young boy, I was at that time not too old myself I was probably 21 at the time and he was about a 17 year old boy I would guess – 18 at the most.

Rick: We lost nearly 300,000 service men and women in World War II and if you were to speak to a young person today that's contemplating serving their country what would you say to them?

Max: Well I think it's a...the military didn't...I have no complaints against the military. They treated me fine. I had a good deal except when we went on the beaches. I had a place to sleep at night on the ship, I didn't get torpedoed. We had a torpedo just miss us and we had a Kamikaze hit the edge of the ship but we were fairly safe on the ship and you did get three meals a day or so and you had a place to sleep and it was always dangerous with air attacks and kamikaze's giving us a hard time towards the end of the war. But I don't know, it served me well. It was clean; you weren't in the dirt as marines and soldiers had to do to put up with that.

Rick: Did you have in your mind about the greatness of the mission it was and how important World War II was and that you were serving your country or were you just there doing your job and thinking that being in harms way like that wasn't going to affect you?

Max: I'd say both. I knew it was a big war because I'd followed Hitler going into Poland when he went in there and so forth and doing this and so it was a big war and of course you knew about it. As I was in high school you'd read in the paper about Hitler so I knew all that and I knew it was very important. Out in the South Pacific I had more cause out there because that was more close to us because we killed people, they killed a lot of sailors and so forth and Hawaii – when I got there in Hawaii to see all those ships sunk in the harbor there, they were just laying there when we came in there. So I knew the greatness but when we got the job that we had I had to think even up until I got home, we would go get troops some places, somehow some other ships had been bringing them to the states to Hawaii and remember Hawaii was not a state at that time, but they would bring them and put them in a camp way down south where there's no fighting and they'd unload them. We'd go back there for enforcements and bring them up so that's what you had to bring up so we were running – we just strictly went into the beach and I was told what to do and I had to do it and everybody else did and anybody else could have done

the same job I did if they would have been there. But what we did was just go in and invade, all we knew was you go in and land them on the beach and have them hit at this time not one minute earlier not one minute late, you'd get shot either way by your own bullets or the other one. So I had about 250 men from that one (25 to a boat) and I was responsible to land about 250 soldiers and marines at the exact time on the beach and that was up to me to do that and those poor marines and soldiers didn't know that their life was kind of depending on what good I did. I recall one incident we came back and the bullets were parting our hair practically and I had to do some multiplication and (I don't know 7 times 9 or something) and I said "*what is it, what is it*"? Because I couldn't get my brain to function and the skipper – Lieutenant Case always says "*we're close enough, we'll eyeball it right now*". So it was close enough we just eyeballed it with the wristwatch the last few yards that we had to go in there and of course we had synchronized watches all of us. So it was – go do that and get back out and staying there and I was at the beach 9 days the longest and 3 days the least. I was in the beach between 3 and 9 days at a time. They sent us in and it's odd they said, "*How did you eat*" because they didn't send us with any food at all and you were at the beach all that time but I'll tell you how we got it. I told you they brought supplies in and there'd be supplies and we could read what it was so we'd bust them open and that's what we ate.

Rick: Where were you when you heard the war was over?

Max: I was – that's a story. My last invasion was Okinawa and that was the last one I was in, the last one in fact the United States had because Truman had the atomic bombs and we didn't have to go anymore. So we came back to Hawaii and our small boat I was on was headed and they'd said that we'd been in so many invasions especially our little boat we'd been in more than some of the others and we're going home and so the night before we went home to start going home in the morning to hit the states and about 7 o'clock that night in came a yeoman with a clipboard and he says "*Max Gu Gu Gu*" – he couldn't pronounce my last name, finally I said "*yeah right here*" and he says "*come with me, you're going over to LCC 39048*" and mine was LCC 39050 and so I went over there because the man that did the job in 048 was killed in the last invasion so I was going to replace the one that got killed. So I went with that crew the 48th and we knew them because they'd been with us sometimes clear from Chicago and that and on those

maneuvers we got to know each other – different crews like airplane pilots doing different crews and so I knew them and in the mean time everybody else went home.

Rick: So you went on one last mission?

Max: We went then and we were on maneuvers on the island and back to your original question on the island of Maui, on the Hawaiian island we were practicing to go and invade Japan and I didn't have much hope. I thought '*God sakes*' I knew what happened in Japan, I knew the terrain and the topography of the land in Japan because I had studied it and I knew they'd shoot down at us and I knew I couldn't last one more – I couldn't be that lucky.

Rick: So you heard that on Maui while you were there that the war was over.

Max: Yes. Our boat when it in to the beach it became the leader in the wave and then when they pushed the Japanese over the hill and they were far enough away and we had all the troops landed that were going to be landed that day. Then we stayed in the beach, we had to stay in the beach and acted, as a communication between what was going on in the beach and what's going with the admirals that were out there ten miles on a battleship.

Rick: And then when they dropped the bomb and the Japanese surrendered you stayed on Maui and went home from Maui.

Max: I went home from Maui, yes I went home on an LST in a terrific storm and the LST that I was on it broke the screw because they went in and the waves and swells were so bad the ship went down and the screws go down in then when it comes up and the tail comes out it's still spinning and when it come down it hit so hard it broke off so we had to put it in tow so we were late getting home and it was December and Christmas was coming but it was heading in the right direction so we put it in tow – us and there were about six LST's loaded with us. I'll tell you how bad it was, that LST – I don't know how thick the steel is on the deck but they were going about four inch ripples – that steel was rippling. When that boat would hit it would ripple about four inches and I was afraid it was going to bust in two.

Rick: Well Max thanks for being with us here today, those were interesting stories and I'm sure you've got a lot more to tell.

Max: I appreciate the opportunity.

Max: In Okinawa we lost a lot in Okinawa. I mean it was...in Saipan we lost in two days 4,000 now that's a lot, that's why were hauling them back out and dumping them in the ocean.

Rick: Did you get decorated at all?

Max: No I never did. I never did mention that. We never did, we were so secret that they called us the '*second most secret*'...

Rick: They didn't want the enemy to know that you were sitting right there...

Max: I've never seen a picture with all the films and everything I've seen, I've got pictures of the war and I've never seen a picture of an LCC. That LCC when it was in port even in San Diego we had a 45 pistol that was issued to the boat and somebody was on watch armed there and watching the Navy who was on Guard Duty and the army on watch. And they sat, if somebody comes to get on it, we don't care – they said "*do not come on this boat I have my orders to shoot you if you do so stay off*". And so it was that secret that they wouldn't...and so we were always at it and I guess they never did take pictures or somehow. I've looked and looked and looked and seen all the invasions and I've never been able to find an LCC.

Rick: Thanks for being with us today, that was great. We're going to be looking forward to hearing from you in November at our meeting at the library.

Max: When I get down there I was going to start at the beginning and go right on through.

Rick: Yes it's hard to compact this into a half an hour but I thought you did a good job.

Max: At four o'clock in the morning you go down that rope to get in the boat and it's four o'clock and you're going to go get to that and the LCVP's they unload them see like that and then the troops go in the side down in the boats and then they pull away and go over here a little ways and they go in a circle. They go round and round and another one loads and he goes over and joins the circle. They keep doing this until they get so many of them – whatever they want, whatever they're doing, whoever is running the show on that. They do that and oh I felt sorry for the soldiers and marines, they would be vomiting, they were seasick! They were going to hit the beach, if you've ever been seasick you feel like laying down and dying or asking somebody to shoot you and so they had to take them in and some of the guys...they give us a half hour training once for taking morphine and you know it came in the old little lead like our toothpaste used to come in out of. I don't think she'll remember but your toothpaste was lead too, it came in little leads, it's plastic now of course but it was lead because lead you could squeeze it and squeeze it out and so your toothpaste was in it. They had one or one ounce or once a shot or anyway and it's like these cans you use to put gas into your lawnmowers that you put the spout out and reverse it and put it that way. So you'd unlead like that, you'd turn it out and did it and there was needle down in it so when you reverse it now you have the needle. And when somebody got hurt or was injured you'd take the shirts like this and if you give them a shot when you got through with that empty thing it's sticking through and then bend the point over. If you give him two you hook them on and when the corpsman gets to this guy you've knocked out he can see he's had two shots of morphine. But I got my ear hurt and I went back to ship and I was on the ship going back to Pearl Harbor that trip and I was out for three days. They morphined me for three days – I lost three days of my life. I woke up....

End interview.