

Interview of Ralph

Interviewer: Well, Ralph, on behalf of KUED and citizens of the United States, we want to thank you for taking the time for you to come up here and have us interview you.

Ralph: Well, thanks for asking me, Rick.

Interviewer: Can you tell us briefly your experiences about joining up? You joined before Pearl Harbor.

Ralph: Right.

Interviewer: Tell me about some of those experiences and some of your thinking -- did you ever think you'd be in combat or what you thought about the Germans over in Europe before you joined up.

Ralph: Well, I was 1-A in the draft and knew it was just a matter of time. I couldn't get a good job, so I went ahead and enlisted. My brother was already in Hawaii, so I asked for duty in Hawaii. The only openings they had was in quarter master. But then said "When you get over there you can put in for a transfer to go into the infantry," which I did. On December 7th -- God knows nobody expected it -- we had been on pass, my brother and I on Friday, the 5th. We went back to the barracks on December 6th because we had an appointment at 8:30 that morning on the 7th to talk to my mother in Denver by short wave radio. So we were having breakfast when we could hear the bombs and everybody said, "Well, the Air Force is finally going on maneuvers." We thought then that it was maneuvers. We walked outside from the barracks and here was a plane diving down, you could see the bullets kicking up the grass on the parade grounds. When he pulled up, you could see him, and you could see the sun on the wings of the

airplane. That's the first time we realized we were being attacked by a foreign country. I stood in behind a pillar when the bullets went right up the pillar, a concrete pillar, and walked around and looked and there were bullets all the way up the pillar. It was a scary morning. It took awhile to really get organized. My brother was supply sergeant for the M-Company. So he opened the door to the supply room, but we only had about 50 rounds of ammunition for the machine gun. That didn't last very long and I don't think we hit anything.

Interviewer: When you went in and joined up, did you have any inkling or were there any rumors that the Japanese--

Ralph: No rumors at all. I thought I could go to Hawaii and be out in two years because Hawaii at that time was considered foreign duty. So my thought was to get my enlistment over with and get back and go to work some someplace.

Interviewer: And the only thing standing between you being one of the first casualties of World War II was a cement post.

Ralph: Right, those pillars were about two foot square and concrete. The barracks -- Schofield Barracks -- were all concrete barracks, three stories.

Interviewer: And how low was the plane?

Ralph: Oh, it couldn't have been more than 20 feet off the ground. He dove right in and peeled up to clear the building.

Interviewer: Could you see the pilot?

Ralph: Oh, yeah, you could see him.

Interviewer: When you first learned that there were 3,000 casualties, or deaths, what went through your mind? What were your thoughts?

Ralph: Well, you show anger.

Crew: Can I stop? Sorry. When he answers these -- maybe he could preface it by, "when I saw those casualties." Because lot of his answers are--

Interviewer: Oh, we need to include the whole thing.

Crew: Yeah he needs to tell more of the story himself. You are sort of telling it for him.

Interviewer: Okay, if I ask the question, in your answer, kind of repeat the question a little bit for the camera so that they get the whole complete thing. So if I ask you, "When you first heard of the casualties, what were your thoughts?" And then you say, "Well, when I first heard of the casualties," or something.

Ralph: Uh huh.

Crew: Thank you.

Interviewer: That's what she wants.

Ralph: Well, when I first heard of the number of casualties that happened that morning, it was shocking because you just can't imagine the damage that was done at Pearl Harbor until you see it. We moved down to Pearl Harbor about 10:30 that morning, so they were still fishing bodies out of the water when we got down there. It was a horrible, horrible experience.

Interviewer: Kind of describe any details you can think of when you first saw the damage and what they were doing, if you can.

Ralph: Well, you just, it was disbelief that something could happen that quick. It only took an hour and 15 minutes for the whole attack to be over. To see the amount of damage and the casualties that they caused in an hour and 15 minutes was just unbelievable. We moved away from Pearl Harbor right quick to set up machine gun positions on the beach because we were preparing for an invasion of Hawaii after the attack. We thought that was going to happen. We tried to get ready for anything that might have happened.

Interviewer: Did you see bodies floating in the water?

Ralph: There were still some bodies they were fishing out. You couldn't get close enough to see the body, but you would see them hooking bodies and pulling them into boats. Most of them had been burned badly because they had the oil fires around a lot of the ships.

Interviewer: Did you see the Arizona, the sunken part of it, or some of the other ships?

Ralph: You couldn't, we didn't know what ships were in there, but we could tell what happened, but we didn't know whether it was the Arizona or what ships were actually involved at that point.

Interviewer: Ralph, what was the first inkling that you had of how many casualties we had. I think we had 3,000 casualties, roughly. Did they tell you that right away, or was it awhile?

Ralph: No, it didn't actually come out in the newspaper until two days later, and I imagine it took that long to get clearance and find out how many were in the hospital, how many were not.

Interviewer: Did you have any idea that that ushered in -- that it was going to usher in the aftermath of war that the United States entered into? What were your thoughts and emotions and feelings that you can recall after that attack?

Ralph: I think after the attack, the first thing you want to do is fight back. I think I thought about that and was ready to fight back. Most of the guys that were in the outfit were ready to do whatever they had to recoup.

Interviewer: There's not too many eyewitnesses of that attack around. So give us as much detail as you can about what you witnessed on the aftermath. Were you were being shot at, you can tell us -- did fear go through you or were you just damn mad at the Japs?

Ralph: I think you didn't have any fear. You realized you had to protect yourself and that's why you stood quickly behind the pillar to get away from the bullets. After that, going down to Pearl Harbor, we weren't there that long to really dig into the whole thing. You see it and you are shocked, but then they say, "We're going to go up to the beach and set up machine gun positions." Then you start thinking about that and preparing for what you thought was going to be an invasion.

Interviewer: You have been President of the Pearl Harbor survivors association for 11 years. I'm sure during that time you've heard some stories. I know that Ken Pots was on the--

Ralph: --on the Arizona, yeah.

Interviewer: Can you relate some of the more interesting stories that you've heard from some of these veterans that you've known that were there?

Ralph: Well, Ken Pots was on the aft deck. He was on the opposite side of the torpedo area, and thank God for that. He'd never have gotten off of that ship if he had been down in the hole. Ken, you have to ask him questions. He won't talk about it. You can ask him questions and find out about it. He was asked to abandon ship when the explosion hit the Arizona, and he got off then

helped fish some people out of the water. Another one is Arnold Underwood, who was on the Helena, and he was assigned a machine gun position on board. He had a mate that was bringing up ammunition to him, and he was shooting at planes and when he needed a new magazine, he'd insert it and he turned to his mate to get another load of bullets for the machine gun, and he had been shot and was laying dead behind him. Arnold didn't even know it. Those things live with you forever, I think.

Interviewer: So, what your duties then after the attack besides setting up machine guns?

Ralph: Well, we moved in and actually took over a Japanese Buddhist camp. They had housing in there and they had the church there. I remember we moved in and the place was full of bed bugs. We had to spray it before we could move the furniture or bedding in. They didn't allow the Japanese in there except on Sunday, they did let them come in and worship. Of course, we stood guard over them at that time. We patrolled the streets in Honolulu at that time, and it was about September that year we started very intensive training to get strength and endurance and they were preparing us for the battle in the pacific, unbeknown to us. The first we had an inkling that something was going on when we loaded onto a transport ship and went around the island and crawled into the landing craft -- full pack, rifles on the back, and the whole works -- then walked back to the barracks. We did this three different times. The last time, we set sail and took off and we were headed for New Zealand.

Interviewer: Did you think that that was just another training mission, did they tell you?

Ralph: They didn't tell us till we were a couple of days at sea that we were headed to New Zealand. Before we got to New Zealand--

Interviewer: Let me ask you one thing before we leave this. What were the attitudes of U.S. personnel towards the local Japanese people in Hawaii?

Crew: I was just going to have you ask that.

Interviewer: Give me a run down on what they felt. Did they kind blame them? What was their attitude toward the Japanese people living in Hawaii?

Ralph: After we heard about how the ships were lined up that morning, we wondered whether they had gotten information to the Japanese about where the ships were, how many, and what the line ups were. We had suspicion, but we didn't have the trust of the Japanese people there. You knew somebody spilled the beans, and who, you began to wonder. But after about six months and seeing the people come into the Buddhist church, it kind of mellowed a little bit. They were human and they were loyal to their being.

Interviewer: Were there any rumors among the servicemen as to who was to blame? Did they blame Roosevelt? They were taken by surprise without being informed. Was there any of that?

Ralph: Well, there was a lot of thought that somebody knew more than we let on. They had a student on the radar system, and the statements were that he contacted them about them number of planes he saw coming in. There was a group of B-52s coming in at the same time from the U.S., and they shoved it off as being the B-52s coming in rather than the Japanese.

Interviewer: I think that was the B-17s.

Ralph: Yeah.

Interviewer: So this student, he wasn't Japanese?

Ralph: No, I think he did his share. We felt the rest of them didn't order a search on that and maybe get some planes up to intercept and find out what was coming on. Sunday morning we had been on base restriction for about five weeks before the attack. On Friday the 5th, with payday, they released everybody to go on pass. We thought that was a little funny that it happened two days before the attack. That happened, anyway.

Interviewer: What was the reason for the base restriction?

Ralph: We were in maneuvers, training.

Interviewer: Before we leave Hawaii, do you have any other questions on Pearl Harbor?

Crew: So, after you witnessed the destruction of the ships and bodies, then you were immediately assigned to go set up machine guns on the beach, you said?

Ralph: Yeah, Mm hmm.

Interviewer: Look at me when you're talking. She'll ask the questions, but look at me for the camera.

Crew: Tell me about those conversations on the beach as you were setting up ammo, about the whole atmosphere and what was happening and the adrenaline and the anger.

Ralph: We were thinking that those guys are going to be coming on shore pretty soon, and we're going to be ready for them. Instead of them coming in and bombing us when we weren't ready for them, we were going to be ready for them. That feeling was throughout – "Boy, they're not coming on shore without a real fight." That intensity was there all the time.

Interviewer: And so it was December '41, and you stayed there until September '42, that's when you--

Ralph: Actually, we shipped out on about the 28th of December of '42. We had been on the ship twice before crawling down the nets and going in o shore. The third time was on December, about December 28th, if I recall, that we actually took off for New Zealand.

Interviewer: So on these training expeditions, you had to have a full back?

Ralph: Full pack, rifle.

Interviewer: Full pack, rifle, just like you were going out to sea. So the third time--

Ralph: --was actual.

Interviewer: --was the actual time. Tell us about when they said you were going to New Zealand. Did they announce it by the PA system?

Ralph: No, it was just passed by word of mouth. We weren't for sure whether that was right or not, the word got out that we were headed for New Zealand. We didn't make it to New Zealand. We found out our orders were changed on the way and the next word we got, we're going in to Guadalcanal. They pulled in to Suva, Fiji to gas up and take water on the ship. They let all of us go off and we had a forced march for about two miles to try and get our land legs back. Then we were told when we got back on that we'd going in to Guadalcanal and the 1st Marines were about to lose Henderson Field, which was the airport at Guadalcanal.

Interviewer: Had you ever heard of Guadalcanal?

Ralph: Never heard of them before, nor the Marshal Islands. Nobody even knew anything about it.

Interviewer: What were the accommodations on board the ship?

Ralph: Well, it was regular troop ship -- lots of hammocks, which were your sleeping beds, hanging in the hull. We had good food, and weren't allowed to smoke or anything on deck at night. Lights out at dark.

Interviewer: Did the ship zigzag?

Ralph: Yeah, we had an escort when we turned to go to Guadalcanal. I think there was about four or five ships, Navy cruisers and destroyers with us. We found out later that we also had a guide submarine that was out front of us.

Interviewer: A U.S. submarine?

Ralph: Yeah.

Interviewer: After you learned you were going to Guadalcanal, did you realize what it was going to be like?

Ralph: No, you just can't describe what it was going to be like until you live it. Guadalcanal is made up of hills that were grass. There was in any growth other than grass on the knolls. But you get off of the hills and go down the ravines, and it was thick growth. Many times you had to cut your way through the underbrush.

Interviewer: Had they trained you for jungle warfare?

Ralph: The training we received, we found out was to train us for the strength and endurance that was needed to crawl up a hill on your belly up your elbows.

Interviewer: Tell us about landing on Guadalcanal.

Ralph: Actually, the ship couldn't get into shore. We had to crawl off on nets into landing barges. Then they'd take us in and we unloaded on the beach. We had no attacks at all going in to Guadalcanal at that time, so we didn't have to fight our way on shore. It took awhile for the landing barges to unload the number of men they had to carry in. We had to go in with rifles and full pack. We were carrying Springfield rifles at that time, and the next day they passed out the M-1 rifles and picked up the Springfield, which really gave us a lot of fire power.

Interviewer: The M-1 was a lot--

Ralph: It was an automatic. The Springfield was a bolt-action with the clip, but just a finger pull.

Interviewer: What did Guadalcanal look like when you first got ashore, and what were your thoughts?

Ralph: When we landed, we landed into a coconut grove and it was a beautiful grove. It had no underbrush at all at that point. We saw the island -- they had a mock make up of the island on the ground and they used that to orientate us of what the terrain was like and so forth. That was on the 9th of January, as I remember. We didn't start the battle until the 10th of January -- that was the first battle I got into.

Interviewer: Was there a lot of fear in your mind? Did you realize you were going to be fighting a very formidable enemy?

Interviewer: We were briefed by the Marines officers of what they had run into. Taking a hill, the hill was called the “galloping horse.” The galloping horse was made up of seven different hills, and each one had a different terrain to it. In fact, the Marine Colonel bet our Colonel that we'd never take the hill. They had attempted to take it, I guess, several times, but the Japanese were dug in so and they machine guns set up. They backed off and they couldn't.

Interviewer: I understand you relieved the 1st Marine Division?

Ralph: Yes, uh huh.

Interviewer: And what did those guys look like?

Ralph: They were beat, you could tell they had been through the war. They had lost quite a few men, and talking to some of them, they said they were willing to join us in going into the fight. They knew there weren't enough people. I think they moved in. They stayed on shore and were assigned another area with the 2nd Marines, so they were willing to fight to the finish.

Interviewer: After you saw those goy guys, tell us what your thoughts were about going into battle with the Japanese and what were your first encounters with the Japanese fighters?

Ralph: Well, you don't think about dying. I didn't at that time. You think about protecting yourself the best you could. When we started up the hill, they assigned the 3rd Battalion on one hill, and the 2nd Battalion on another hill, and they assigned us on the back hill to keep the Japanese from going into what they call the thick jungle along the river. They didn't want them to get back in to their, that territory. We ran into machine gun positions, and the only scare I really had going up that hill was when we got within maybe 15 feet of the Japanese machine gun

position. Here come about three grenades, landed right in middle of us, but didn't explode. But we were close enough that we threw ours in and knocked the position out.

Interviewer: You had three Japanese grenades? All three of them were duds?

Ralph: Yep, how lucky can you get?

Interviewer: The machine gun, was he firing away at you?

Ralph: Yeah, they had them mounted, and they had a wall, a rock wall built up in front of these, and they couldn't tip the machine gun real sharp. So, on our bellies we could stay below the fire, and you just crawled up there with your elbows and on your belly. Everybody had a gas mask, and that gas mask had to be 18 by 18 over your shoulder strap. When we got up to the top and looked back down the hill, all you could see were these gas masks scattered all over the ground. Nobody had them.

Interviewer: They were throwing them away.

Ralph: We were getting rid of them because trying to drag those -- and they weighed I would guess maybe 10 or 12 pounds -- but we got rid of them in a hurry and never did get them issued back again.

Interviewer: So, continuing on, you're going on up that hill. What were some of the other experiences you had trying to take that hill?

Ralph: Well, we did lose, I think we lost about five guys going up the hill. You think about them, but you're so dang busy trying to protect yourself and getting up the hill that you kind of disregard, even though some of them you knew after you got up and found out who it was after they got killed. That's when it hits you, not during the fight.

Interviewer: What was night like? Did you have to dig a fox hole?

Ralph: Well, we tried to make it to the crest of the hill before dark, and we would dig a fox hole and sleep in the fox hole. One of the biggest problems that we had on Guadalcanal was supplies. One of the battalions got tied down on the hill and didn't make it to the crest. Those guys got dehydrated, got disoriented, and some of them would stand up and get shot. Just couldn't get any water. We found out about it and were ordered then during the next night, and it rained every night. You were ringing wet when you woke up in the morning, and by an hour later, you were ringing wet from perspiration. We were ordered then instead of spreading our tarps out that we would tie them and catch rain water at night and fill our canteens with rain water for drinking water for the next day. That was a constant deal clear through the 21 days, every night we filled our canteens up with rain water for the next morning.

Interviewer: Now, digging those fox holes, was it rocky or was it easy to dig in?

Ralph: It was grassy and pretty soft ground on the hills. We wouldn't dig too deep, just enough to get below the surface, maybe a foot and a half deep. So we didn't dig real deep.

Interviewer: So one guy, would you have somebody--

Ralph: We'd have normally, 3 or 4 would be in the same fox hole. Somebody was assigned to guard outside the area--

Interviewer: --while the other guys slept.

Ralph: Yeah.

Interviewer: And how long were the shifts?

Ralph: About 5 hours.

Crew: This is when you want to say, "The shifts were 5 hours."

Ralph: The shifts were about 5 hours.

Crew: Thank you, because it's starting to get--

Interviewer: It's hard to do. But, you need to think of a complete story for the camera coming from your lips rather than my question.

Crew: Or maybe you could ask with "tell us about or describe." That always works out.

Interviewer: Yeah. So give us a feeling of staying the night and then waking up the next day and help us to understand what it must have been like to spend 21 straight days doing that.

Ralph: Well, you didn't move every day. We would take a hill and maybe rest the next day and they would do air drops of food, but they couldn't drop any water. So I learned to eat Spam and learned to hate it. I hate it to this day. They would drop and you would normally spend that day getting ready for the next push. The next day or two days, you would make your move again, and you would fight through these jungles. The Japanese would tie themselves up in the trees -- actually tie themselves to a limb -- and when you go through, they were snipers. A lot of the guys got wounded or killed, most of them were wounded by them. These guys, I don't know how many times these Japanese were tied up and got hit with ammunition because you'd walk through and you were constantly looking at the trees as you go through the jungle. If you saw one of them, you'd shoot them and somebody else come through and see it and get another shot into them, but they wouldn't fall because they were tied in. It would take a good day to go through the jungle areas. The widest one was a river that went through and the jungle area that

was probably a mile across. So you were in that jungle area over a day getting through the jungle before you got to the next hill.

Interviewer: Give us as much detail as you can and your thoughts walking through those jungles.

Crew: And how jungle fighting is different than other types of fighting. Give us a sense of what it is like.

Ralph: It was humid and you had to have a Bowie knife to chop through some areas. It was that thick through the jungle. To go through a mile of that, sometimes we didn't get through. We'd go as far as we could and cut paths and sometimes retreat back to the hill you just got off of to make sure that you had that protection range around you at night because in the jungle, you had none. And it was scary even going out of there at dusk. They had some big lizards, probably two or three feet long. They were tree climbers, and once in awhile those things would fall out of a tree and you'd think you had a Jap coming, you know. That got to be kind of a joke. In fact, we caught one and put a noose on him and called it our pet (laughter). It helped to add to the scary part of jungle fighting is when these darn things come falling out of the tree.

Interviewer: What about snakes?

Ralph: No snakes. We didn't run in to any snakes.

Interviewer: Did you ever have a buddy or someone close to you get shot by a sniper?

Ralph: Yep, a couple of guys.

Interviewer: And were they killed?

Ralph: Yes, one was killed, one was wounded.

Crew: Can you say that? Can we have him go back and say that whole?

Interviewer: Yeah, just go back and say "I had two buddies killed by snipers," or something.

Ralph: Well, I had two close buddies. One killed and one wounded going through the jungles.

Of course, you'd hope that both of them were just wounded. But when you get through, you get a reading that night, and a lot of them didn't make it.

Interviewer: We've interviewed others and they said they were just scared about every minute of the day. Is that pretty accurate description?

Ralph: I didn't feel scared as much because you were so darn busy cutting through or looking that if you let it get to you that much, I'm afraid you'd lose your self-image and your direction. I think maybe you get scared when your buddy gets shot. You think about it. But it's a very short time. You're so darn busy trying to get through and protect yourself.

Interviewer: In the evening or at night, did you ever experience a bonzai charge by a group of Japanese?

Ralph: No, we had one individual Japanese crawl in, but he was identified and killed right away. I can't remember the words, but the Japanese cannot pronounce certain syllables. All the passwords would have that syllable in them. So you'd say, "Who's there?" Give the word, and they couldn't pronounce the words even if they knew the password, if they'd heard it. So you were able to identify them pretty early on.

Interviewer: How many days did you go without taking a shower?

Ralph: 21 days.

Interviewer: You went for three weeks?

Ralph: But you didn't need to shower, you were ringing wet at night anyway. One of the funny things about the third day, after we were catching the water and getting it in our canteens, little did we know that they had some blow flies over there, and the blow flies were laying their eggs in the tarps. And so when we were drinking the water, we were drinking larva eggs. Everybody got worms. They would itch like heck. I'll have to tell you a story, I don't know whether you can put this on the air.

Interviewer: They edit it all, anyway.

Ralph: One night when we were there, one of the guys said, "I've got to go to the bathroom." He crawled out, and when he came back, he was huffing and puffing. And I said, "Did you run in on somebody?" He said, "No, I just had to chase it all over the hill to cover it up."

Interviewer: Normally for sanitation, you dig latrines or ditches or something for your waste? How would you handle that?

Ralph: We'd dig a hole, and a lot of times, they would do their waste in their helmet because you have a liner in your helmet and they'd take the liner out of their helmet and use their metal helmet, and then the next morning, take and wash it out and bury it.

Interviewer: Having to fight snipers and all that stuff was one thing, but you were constantly in water and jungle rot was one problem and malaria. So talk about those situations.

Ralph: Well, after the 21 days, we went back into the bivouac area and I took my shoes off, and my socks had rotted off right at the top of my boots. So I had no sock below the top of my boots at all. Both feet, I had jungle rot on them. Your feet would blister and itch and break and the

blisters would break. I didn't get rid of that till 1967. They tried everything, even soaking my feet in embalming fluid day after day to try to kill it. Then they came out with a new foot salve in 1967 that killed it, and I have never had a problem since.

Interviewer: So all that time, you had blisters and sores from jungle rot for 20, 30 years?

Ralph: Yep, and at night, you'd rub your feet together and the itching, you know, and then you'd break the blister and it'd bleed.

Interviewer: Now, tell us about malaria that was another problem there.

Ralph: Well, when we got back, most all of us had malaria. They started us on Quinine and Atabrine, taking doses of it. After I was in bivouac area about five days, the company Doctor said, "I want you to do a little exercise. I want to check your heart." And I said, "Well, my heart seems to be all right." And he said, "Just do it for me." He found out, evidently the malaria or something had caused the rhythm in my heart to skip a beat. After a day of that, they said, "We're sending you up to New Hebrides to the hospital," and they flew me from Guadalcanal into New Hebrides which was a 25th Division evacuation hospital. I was there about five days. They loaded me on a hospital ship, a small hospital ship, and that time we did go to New Zealand and picked up four sailors that had been burned in an oil burn. Then they took us back to Suva, Fiji. There they had a hospital that was manned by Doctors and nurses from Johns Hopkins Hospital. I was there until about May of '43, and the heart doctor I had there ended up being Dwight Eisenhower's heart specialist. He wanted, he said, "Would you like to stay here? I'd like to have you do some work from here." I said, "No, if I can't go back to duty, I'd like to go back to the States." "I can tell you this, you're not going back into duty." He said, "Before we do anything, I want to pull your wisdom teeth." So he pulled them, and they had to do it in two

sessions. When I came out, they knock me clear out because they had to split them. Then after the second operation, he said, "How you feeling?" I said, "Pretty good." He said, "Well, this will make you feel better," and it was my orders to come back to the states.

Interviewer: I am going to ask you one more question about the jungle. Did you encounter Japanese hidden in caves and people with flame throwers would have to burn them out?

Ralph: That was mainly on the hills they would build their deal, and they would cut tunnels between machine gun positions. When you'd get them pushed, they would go back into the tunnels. The only way to get them out was to have the flame unit come in and burn them out. That was pretty scary. You'd feel for them, you really do, when you'd see them come out of there on fire.

Interviewer: And you saw that a few times.

Ralph: Yep.

Interviewer: Uh, pardon?

Crew: Can you talk about--

Interviewer: Give us as much detail and information as you can, what went through in that jungle because, you know, we don't get a chance to talk to too many people that have gone through the jungle experience. So anything else you can think of and talk about getting these guys out.

Were you right there trying to get them out and then call in a flame thrower?

Ralph: No, you didn't get into the flame thrower in the jungle itself. It's when you're taking a hill. Your jungle fighting was basically with the snipers because it was so thick in there that trying to shoot somebody in on the ground would just be dang near impossible for them to find

you or get a good shot at you, except from up above in the trees. Casualties from the Japanese would be from the bunkers or rushing you going up the hill. We had some of that. A group would rush in and try and kill you just walking up the hill.

Interviewer: How about booby traps, did you run in to any of those?

Ralph: Yeah, some of the guys early--

Interviewer: You mentioned booby traps.

Ralph: Yeah, they would wire a dead man with a grenade underneath, or had a booby trap with him. Some of the guys trying to get a rifle or something else off of the Japanese would get injured, not killed, but injured. Right away, the orders were, "Do not try and pick any souvenirs up off the dead Japanese."

Interviewer: So they had a grenade or something.

Ralph: Yep.

Interviewer: Ready to, uh--

Crew: Can I ask? I am unclear, what was your mission and what was your position? Were you an infantryman?

Ralph: Pardon?

Interviewer: The question was, what was your mission there in Guadalcanal, and were you a corporal or private?

Ralph: I was a Tech-5, the same grade as a corporal.

Interviewer: As a corporal.

Ralph: My brother was a staff sergeant. We were not in the same battalion all the time. We crossed each other a couple times in the battle, but other than that, we weren't together. He was in one battalion, and I was in another.

Interviewer: Did he have pretty much the same experiences that you had?

Ralph: Yes, yep. He caught malaria and came back to the States and he was not discharged. He was reassigned to a new outfit and he went in to the island of Leyte. On Leyte, he got a field appointment for lieutenant from staff sergeant, and was assigned a platoon, and he was on the initial wave at Okinawa.

Interviewer: Oh my gosh, so he saw a lot of action, didn't he. He survived the war?

Ralph: Yep. He just passed away about three years ago. He lived in Albuquerque.

Interviewer: Mm hmm. Now, what was your mission there, just to get all the Japanese off the island?

Ralph: Yep, and then, Colonel told us that the Japanese would not surrender or said, "Don't try and take a captive because it's impossible." So we knew that it was either kill them or that was it. Our mission was to clean the island out of Japanese. We had pushed them right up to the shore. We overlooked a little community and another river, and since we had been on the front that long, we were ordered to hold there till the "Americal Division" came, and that was probably a three day mission for them. We had told them then, the Colonel told them then we pushed them awful hard. They would hold up down in this ravine, and they went and cleaned

them up. That was the last group that they had. They had some they found that were scattered throughout the island that were there when we left, actually.

Interviewer: Now, did the mission get finished, at the end of 21 days?

Ralph: Our mission was through.

Interviewer: That's when you went to the bivouac area?

Ralph: Yep.

Interviewer: Now, when was your first shower after that 21 days?

Ralph: About two hours after we got into bivouac, we had water hanging up. They'd heat it and put it on a rack and you'd just stand underneath it and had holes in it and take a shower out in the open.

Interviewer: Did you have soap?

Ralph: Had soap, yep.

Interviewer: Did you have a change of clothes?

Ralph: Yeah, we got change of clothes and dry socks and shoes. Our shoes were actually sopping wet all the time and bent out of shape.

Interviewer: Did you ever see the movie "Guadalcanal Diary"?

Ralph: No.

Interviewer: You never saw that.

Ralph: I saw the "Pearl Harbor" movie and "Tory! Tory! Tory!"

Interviewer: Tell us about, uh, did you fly home or take a ship back to the states?

Ralph: I took a ship back. In fact, it was a hospital ship. I was up and about and the sailors -- we hit gruff water coming in, and all the sailors got sick -- and they asked if anyone can stand watch. They put me up on the crow's nest and the water was coming up clear over us and they had dropped anchors and were dropping anchors trying to hold it in the water. But that was, that was a two-day storm. Then we got to San Francisco. I mentioned that I had my wisdom teeth pulled and my jaws were out like this. They thought I had mumps. One of the doctors came in and checked them, and no, I couldn't hardly talk. They took me in to Letterman Hospital and just pried my jaw open and of course it was all the fluid and stuff in the jaw.

Interviewer: Where were you when the war ended?

Ralph: Let's see, I was in on the job. I was assigned to Holloman Air Force Base at Alamogordo, New Mexico. That's when they set off the first atomic bomb was on the--

Interviewer: So you were stationed down there in New Mexico when they tested that bomb?

Ralph: As a civilian, yeah. I was a civilian on base. I got married December of '43, and first worked for a year in Englewood, Colorado, and then they sent me to Alamogordo as camp manager. I was there -- we lived on base -- when they set off the first atomic bomb. I had a staff sergeant that lived next door, and that afternoon he said, "I was out on the flight line, and you could have read a newspaper." Well, the report was that some ammunition had exploded. Well, everybody knew it wouldn't be on the bombing range, but they didn't know what it was.

Interviewer: So you didn't know what was going on there, and when that test occurred, how important that was?

Ralph: That's right.

Interviewer: Well, Ralph, uh, those were interesting experiences. You got any other questions?

Crew: I do. So I'll just ask you, and you can just look at

Interviewer: So talk to me, and she'll ask the question.

Ralph: Okay.

Crew: You're a part of the Utah Association chapter?

Ralph: Yeah.

Interviewer: I'll tell you, the question is, you were a part of the Pearl Harbor Survivors' Association.

Crew: So if he could describe the spirit and uniting force that binds vets together as a generation.

Interviewer: She wants to know kind of the spirit and comradery, the things that binds those veterans together. You were the President for the last 11 years, so this is right up your ally.

Ralph: The motto of the Pearl Harbor survivors is "Keep America Alert." Never let it happen again. The association carried that message out to the schools early in the career, we used to talk to history groups at the high schools and tell them a little bit about it. Mainly the important thing is, don't ever let it happen to the U.S. again, a surprise attack. Keep America alert. That has kind of bound the organization together. It became a national organization in about 1964 and it

was hard to get out the word about the organization. In fact, the Utah chapter was formed in '64 and they had a heck of a time finding any veterans from Pearl Harbor and Gibson, who was a radio announcer on Channel 4, got ahold of the request and he really boosted the thing on the news, asking them to get ahold of this one guy that had moved here from Oregon. He really got it started, was through Gibson from Channel 4.

Crew: What is it that keeps you, what gets people interested and returning every year for reunions?

Interviewer: Tell us a little bit about the spirit of getting together and how it feels to meet with other Pearl Harbor survivors every year.

Ralph: Well, we have a monthly meeting of all the survivors, the second Saturday of every month and have a luncheon. When I first got acquainted with Pearl Harbor survivors back in '91, in Utah there was a total of 92 members. Of course, we report every death of a member is reported into national. We have a publication by a recorder and it lists the death of all the members. Those meetings are an experience. We ask about -- about every third meeting -- ask them to stand and introduce themselves and station because we have visitors come in and family members. Right now when we have a meeting, we have five survivors and a total of about 30 to 35 people. So, the families are there -- the wives, the grandkids, the great grandkids all attend those lunches.

Crew: Why is it important for them to come?

Ralph: I think just the fellowship that you develop. Everyone knows they've been through the same experience, and it kind of ties you as a brother with them. And the interest of the families

is amazing. It's amazing that they come to every meeting. They drive in from Salem and up in Cache Valley and the families normally come down with them.

Interviewer: That's interesting, there's a real bond there, isn't there.

Ralph: Yeah.

Interviewer: Ralph, if you wanted to leave a message for future generations about the war and your experiences, what would you want to say to future generations?

Ralph: Well, appreciate what you have. It didn't come easy, and don't lose it. Be sure and honor your heritage.

Interviewer: Very well said. Well, we want to thank you so much for coming in and sharing these thoughts, Ralph. You know, I've known you a lot of years, and I never heard of Guadalcanal -- 21 days of combat had to be some of the toughest that anybody had ever faced. I just can't imagine what that was.

Crew: How old were you, Ralph, when you were in Guadalcanal? How old were you?

Ralph: Well, let's see, I was 21 when Pearl Harbor, so I was two years older.

Interviewer: Twenty-three, yeah. Thanks again for coming--

Ralph: Thanks for having me.

Interviewer: --and making it possible

End of recording

