

Oral History Icon

Chitty, Murray, 5th Shore Party Battalion, 5th Marine Division, and Bob Hughes, 4th Marine Division. An interview with Fritz Hamer. 3 April 2003. Transcribed by Eric Speer. South Carolina State Museum, Columbia, South Carolina.

Murray Chitty and Bob Hughes both served at Iwo Jima. Murray Chitty lived from 1926 to 2004, and was a native South Carolinian. Bob Hughes is a Pennsylvania native, but has lived in South Carolina since the end of World War II.

Abbreviations

MC = Murray Chitty

FH = Fritz Hamer

Bob= Bob Hughes

FH: I am going to start by asking where you grew up.

MC: I grew up in Langley, South Carolina – Aiken County.

FH: Your father was a farmer?

MC: [He worked at a] Cotton mill. Linthead.

FH: How did you end up in the Marines?

MC: When I was about nine or ten years old, I was living in Augusta behind the King Mill. I worked on a bread truck helping...

FH: At ten years old?

MC: Oh, God. I was seven years old, I was going down Broad Street pulling a wagon with magazines and a shoeshine box on top. Anyway, these guys were all truck drivers – they had the 19th Reserve Battalion there. This was in – I was born in '26 – and this was in about '36. I remember the day they went and registered for the draft – my driver did, Mr. Rainey.

FH: Your driver?

MC: He was the guy I helped on the truck. I had to get in the service. Man, I just had to go. I tried the Army and the guy lost his razor blade. He went down to get another razor blade and he didn't come back. So, I went over to the Navy. The guy gave me some papers and I carried them

home. My Dad threw them in the trash. So, I went to the Marine recruiter. He gave me some papers and I filled them out.

FH: How old were you then?

MC: I turned 15 the 14th of February and I went in the 12th of June. I was 16 years and 4 months old.

FH: This was about '43?

MC: '42. So, I went from there to Macon, Georgia and I was sworn into the Marine Corps. [I] went to Parris Island. A lot of things happened to me there. I got stuff in my eye [and] lost my platoon – they went to _____, Florida.

FH: What did you get in your eye?

MC: I was firing an .03 rifle and it had a cartridge that exploded inside and put lead back in the eye and over the eye. I was only in the sick bay 12 hours, but I missed my regular platoon, so I had to do two more weeks of boot camp with another platoon. But, if I had stayed with that platoon, I would have gone to _____, Florida, to amtracs. I would have wound up in Bougainville - that's where they went. So, everything was lucky. I met my wife because that happened.

FH: At Parris Island?

MC: I met her in Rhode Island. I left boot camp and I went to Naval Air Station Quonset Point, Rhode Island. I got up there Labor Day of '42 and I left there in October of '44 [later stated this was '43]. I joined the 5th Marine Division [at] Camp Pendleton. So, when I saw this, that's when everything was coming around. I was Staff Sergeant. I figured up last night I made Staff Sergeant [when] I was 17 years old. I was actually a supply, you know, supply unit.

FH: How did you get into Supply?

MC: That was just something that they were building the unit and they gave me the 0400 MOS. I was an 0300, everybody was an 0300. Then, when we got into the field I was Assistant Platoon Leader. We trained at Pendleton and then left there in June of '44.

FH: June of '44?

MC: June of '44.

FH: I thought you got to Pendleton in the fall of '44.

MC: No, I'm sorry, '43. Yeah.

FH: So, you got to Pendleton in the fall of '43, trained, and then in June of '44...

MC: Then in June of '44 we left. My regiment left and went aboard the Georgia _____. We didn't know where we were going because the other division was still at Pendleton. We went to Guam. We were offshore for backup for the invasion of Guam. We didn't go in; we came back to Hilo, Hawaii, Camp Tawara [?]. That is where we started training for the division.

FH: If we could back up a minute; at Pendleton, what were some of the things they trained you for?

MC: Hiking, walking, hiking, walking, weapon training – Pendleton had a lot of that.

FH: What kind of weapons did you train on?

MC: When I went through boot camp, I went with an '03 [Springfield] Rifle. That was one of the last platoons that went through with the '03 [Springfield] Rifle. Then I got the M1 Rifle and they changed that to the Reising Submachine Gun. [Everybody laughs] We threw that away...

FH: You used that Reising Submachine Gun at Pendleton a little?

MC: No, they sent it overseas and they threw it away.

[Bob Hughes]: All you had to do was look at it and it rusted. [laughs]

MC: You ever hear of it?

FH: Yes.

MC: Anyway, they replaced that with the [M1941] Johnson Rifle. [It had] a _____ stock on it. I got to Pendleton [California, and] my TO weapon was a carbine, as a Staff NCO [Non-Commissioned Officer]. When I went to Iwo, I had a carbine and a .45 pistol.

FH: So, when you were at Pendleton, you had the carbine primarily?

MC: Carbine, primarily.

FH: Did you carry that .45 with you at all at Pendleton?

MC: Oh, yeah. It was part of my TO weapon. We didn't walk around with a strap – nothing like that, even in Hawaii. When we got back to Hawaii, we went up to a place called Camp Tarawa.

FH: Tarawa?

MC: It was part of a ranch, a big cattle ranch. Back on Tarawa, if I may say, I believe [that] Tarawa was the bloodiest battle the Marine Corps ever fought. I believe that. I met some guys that [came] off of it. Anyway, we got there and we trained. Then I went back to Camp Banyon, downtown Hilo, Banyon Drive. They started loading ships out of there. We were loading ships in August and we left Hilo around New Years' Day.

FH: Of '45?

MC: Yes. We went to Pearl [Harbor] and then we bounced around and we made landings. I changed ships – I went from a transport to an LST, landing ship, at a place.... I can't think of it right now. The Japs had been in there and blew up a bunch of LSTs. So, we went over and got an LST and took that to [Antioch ?]. Then, I got to Saipan and we changed again. The water was so rough at Saipan that we changed ships again. That was a mystery to me. I've never found out why. If I go into detail, I could have missed the operation from being in the wrong boat. They told, "We are going back to Guam." I told this Lieutenant, Garcia was his name, I said, "What are you going to do?" I had just turned 19 and we got a ride in. We got in the boats about 6:30, 7:00 in the morning. We had steak and eggs and they gave us three bottles of brandy.

FH: Each company?

MC: No. Three mini-bottles of brandy, each person.

FH: What were you instructed with those? Were you supposed to drink those before?

MC: They never said, but the chief that gave them out stayed drunk for 36 days on Iwo because he had it all. That's the truth. At Saipan we lost some people, the water was so rough. I was getting off an LST to go on another one. The LCVP [often called a Higgins boat] would come up and you jump. They said jump and I jumped. I was coming down the net and they got so far and they said jump. So, we jumped in the boat...

FH: You jumped from the net to the boat?

MC: Yes, as it would come by. It couldn't get the net inside the boat. I fell between the boat[s] and got pretty wet. So, we got on the LST. I turned 19 on the 14th of February and we landed five days later. I remember we didn't sleep too much. We had one sub alert, maybe two or three. When we got for the landing in the morning, I remember me and this SeaBee Chief, he worked for Barnum and Bailey, he had damn tattoos all over him, he was a tattoo man. But those SeaBees, I must say, the most valuable thing that the Navy ever created. Oh, those people are something. So, when we went, that morning see all the flashes from the island...

FH: You landed on the island on the 19th?

MC: On the morning of the 19th. We got in the boats – I guess we loaded our stuff about 6:00. We got in our boat. That's when we found out we were in the wrong boat. They had us in another boat from my squad and my lieutenant. We were on the wrong boat. We were on the wrong LST.

FH: Oh, to start with.

MC: That's right. They put us on the wrong LST at Saipan. On the way from Saipan to Iwo we fired weapons every day, cleaned our weapons, calisthenics, got religion, played poker –I didn't play no poker, read books, and learned what Japanese we could. When we got ready for the landing, we got in the boats...

FH: Were these Higgins' Boats?

MC: I went in an LCVP – Landing Craft Vehicles Personnel. We went on the line, I guess we were about 3,000 – 4,000 feet out, maybe a mile out, I guess, and we went in our landing circle.

Before we went on our boats, President Roosevelt talked to us. Then the skipper, Admiral Nimitz talked to us – you could hear it on the PA system, canned music.

FH: Do you remember what they said at all?

MC: Oh, yeah, wishing us well and how important it was for the empire and all of that.

FH: [talking to Bob Hughes]: Did you get that, Bob, before you landed?

[Bob]: I don't remember.

MC: I've got a pretty good memory on that stuff.

FH: Uh-huh.

MC: I didn't even think about this thing until about ten years ago and we were going to reunions and things, talking to different guys. So, that morning when we broke into line of departure, we started into the beach. The coxswain says, "500 yards, 400 yards, 300 yards, 200 yards. You damn jarhead, you have been wanting to fight all the way over here, you'll get your chance." We didn't have a chance. We couldn't get off the boat, the beach was so crowded. We tried to dig up on that ash. But, we lost... I've got a clip that the Commandant in the Marine Corps put out about three years ago. It's 12 minutes [long]. Crulac is Commandant. I lost my lieutenant in 15 minutes. Lieutenant Cartmy [?], he got hit.

FH: Even before you got out of the boat, or just after?

MC: Right after we got out of the boat. Danny Garcia was his name. [The] Assistant Leader was a guy named Ginsberg, his brother was a catcher for the Detroit Tigers at the time. They were replacements. Remember we carried replacement officers in with us. So, when we got on the beach, we just survived.

FH: You were getting all kinds of fire from everywhere?

MC: We weren't getting any rifle fire, that I can remember. Bob and them might have, they were way up.

[Bob]: When we hit, it was mostly mortars, stuff like that.

MC: That's right. See, we were here [apparently pointing to a map]. That's Green Beach. 28th Marines went this way and that way. I landed with the 27th, Baker Company, Pioneers. A Company was with the 28th. We worked this area here. I can't describe it to you [the situation].

FH: It was just total mayhem.

MC: I realized then what war was.

[Bob]: Mass confusion.

MC: Oh, yes, and I realized then what war was. But, amazing _____, once you get acclimated, you know where you are at, you know what you are there for, but you are not like this. The worst thing I found in this operation, it was supposed to be for three days, and it lasted 36. The powers that be said it supposed to be on the 16th of March, but it wasn't. We got into our trouble on the 26th.

FH: Can we go back a minute? Tell me what were your basic duties with the Pioneer unit.

MC: We were in a shore party battalion and we were to get the ammunition off the ships and into the dumps and take it to the lines –furnish it out. Well, it didn't work that way. We couldn't get it off the beach. I've got a critique somewhere that says my battalion was put in a defensive position with offensive weapons.

FH: What was your battalion, again?

MC: 5th Pioneer Battalion.

FH: You said that. OK.

MC: The Pioneers, the tanks, it is all service, medical battalion, weapons companies, it is all in the same group. We are more or less the carburetor. We furnish them [the infantry]. Just, normal different things that happened. The morning the flag went up [on Mount Suribachi], we were

down in here. Somebody said, “A flag is up.” We looked and it was flying high. In fact, this is what we did. We looked [a little later, apparently] up for the flag and it was gone. Somebody said, “Oh, hell,” and you look to see if you have ammunition. What it was, they took that flag down and put the other one up, and then the big one went up. I guess we were from here to there when it went up [pointing at map, again].

FH: Bob, you were over here when you saw it?

[Bob]: I was over there, opposite of the stone quarry. But, I never knew if it was the first or the second one. I had other things to take care of right at that time. But, I just happened to look up and see that thing.

MC: Bob and them, that 4th Division, I’ve read on it, they hit the grinder. They lost 500 people in 100 yards. We lost about 400 people in the first three hours. That is what the statistics come up with.

FH: So, what is happening this first few hours? Just mortar shells and artillery coming in from the enemy?

MC: Going on this rock [Iwo] and coming off was like walking through the rain and not getting wet. It poured down rain the second day and the guy said, “Is it rain?” I said, “I read about it.” But, we came off of it [Iwo] the 26th of March. What we did in between was just normal, on your belly, running, frontal attack. I can say this honestly, I don’t think I saw ten Japs, live ones, running, on the whole island. But, we got up in here [evidently pointing], this was our last point for an organized bivouac area. We were up here and the Japs were down in here, and at night, I’d say for probably about two days, we knew they were there and they would get out at night and smoke those cigarettes and “ch-ch-ch-ch” [sounds out the noise], trying to draw your fire.

FH: So, they were talking or shooting?

MC: They just wanted to draw your fire. They were talking.

FH: I see.

MC: So, somebody threw a grenade and we got in a grenade fight that night. Well, we threw grenades; I don't know that they threw any back. I think we lost some people in friendly fire. But, what we were doing, we were taking a grenade, and you would hold it in your hand. You take your helmet off and put your grenade under [it], pull the pin and drop the spoon. It would arc and you only had a second or two to get rid of it, because we didn't want them to see the arc. That's about it.

FH: Let me go back here. How long did it take you after you got on the beach until you could start going inland? Did it take a day or more?

MC: Take us to where?

FH: To get off the beach.

MC: I guess we were off that beach in about four days.

FH: In most of that time, that four days, you were under constant fire?

MC: Absolutely. Well, it was a "boom-boom-boom-boom," for the first day it was. It kind of quieted down at night a bit. But, they would [use] mortars. The rifle fire, I found this out later when we were sitting around talking, they would hit one person. They wouldn't kill him, they didn't try to kill him, [but] put him on a stretcher. That took four men out getting him back to the beach. That reduced your forces.

FH: What did you do, try to dig in as much as you could in that sand?

MC: You know what _____ matting is?

FH: Yes.

MC: OK, _____ planking?

FH: Un-huh.

MC: There was some going up for the airstrips, and the SeaBees (boy are those guys something), they came down and they had those T-18s, and they pulled some up and put sandbags underneath them. We would get under those. I don't ever remember sleeping or taking a shit. I don't ever

remember, honest to God. I went in the Marine Corps, weighed 168 pounds and came out, weighed 169, but I felt 140 on the island.

FH: So, you didn't eat anything, probably?

MC: Well, yeah. We had those damn flies, I never have got used to flies, they were about that big. You could put a little tail on them and they would advertise for you, I guess. You take a mouthful. Those war dogs, they wouldn't come to you, you'd try to trick them. I think that the pinscher was the best dog.

FH: So, you had dog?

MC: No, we had a dog platoon. They were part of the service battalion.

FH: There was a dog group on the island?

MC: Oh, yeah.

FH: I didn't know about that.

MC: They had pinschers, german shepherds...

[Bob]: Rottweilers.

MC: I didn't see any rottweilers.

[Bob]: Yeah, we had some rottweilers.

FH: They [the dogs] were for what?

MC: Take care of messages. I tell you what, they'd get in a hole, now these guys, me and my buddy ____ in Aiken, Tom wasn't here. They had a dog platoon and they would let you know that it was something that wasn't supposed to be there. I know one time we were up there off these rocks, _____ Rock, and there was a pinscher that came down that was all business, over a hole just like that, he didn't even turn his head. We were trying to see if we could turn him. They'd carry messages. You would see them on the beach, [ones] that were wounded. They would have them on a hospital ship operating on them. When one got hit, they carried his trainer with him. I saw in the paper the other day where they were giving dogs to people from different

places at that time during the war. They'd bring their dogs home with them, de-programming them all. They would stay right by that trainer.

FH: When they were given a message, how would they know where to go?

MC: I guess whistles; I don't know.

FH: After you finally got off the beach, your main job was to carry ammunition and stuff?

MC: When we came off the beach, we started our movement. The regiments were only up in here [evidently pointing]. You can see the line from here [to here]. This tells about the Japs starting down. We came in this, our bivouac, the 5th Pioneer Battalion, that was my outfit. Up here was the 21st Fighter Group. That is the one where the Japs came down in there. They came through the SeaBees down there. They went through those tents and I saw those guys walking around with their guts hanging in their hands.

FH: Marines?

MC: No, they were Air Force pilots. They came in because the war was over. We were waiting to go aboard ship. There is a book that has been written about this thing. I'll tell you what brought it about. I better not talk. This book has been written and they want to make a movie. I received some stuff from somebody. I didn't answer it. Tony Lima told me, up in New Jersey, there were about 20 or 30 guys answered this guy's questions. I didn't answer. He picked about four of them and it is called *The Final Battle, Thirty-Six Days of Hell with the Final Battle*. The book has been written and is going to the publisher. I'll get you a copy when it comes [out].

FH: Thanks.

MC: We came up this side here. Each outfit had like a bivouac area set up, waterpoints to come back [to]. We worked out of here, up in here. If it would have went right and they hadn't had so many casualties, we could have come off that island and probably finish our job. A lot of them did, and go somewhere else. But, they didn't have anybody. They were losing men. They wanted General _____ Smith to put more men on the island. He said, "Hell, I ain't got the room to put

the ones I got now.” So, we worked up in here. Maybe one day we would relieve one regiment. Maybe one day somebody would relieve another regiment. Now, Bob, he got hit by friendly fire. See. Tell him about that Bob.

[Bob]: No, he already has the whole story on that [the tape recorder].

FH: Yes, he’s already told me how that happened.

MC: I’ll tell you, the night that happened, somebody hollered, “Gas!” That was the most scared I was on that island. I started looking for that cotton-picking gas mask. I was scared. I’ll tell you why. In Augusta, I lived not too far from the Linman [?] Hospital when I was a kid. All those people were World War I gas [attack victims]. You would see one walking downtown with about five dogs on each string and his britches leg rolled up. On Saturday you would see them going down the street like that. I was scared to death of the gas. Fear, everybody had fear. Without it, you can get killed. We had one guy there, I forgot his name, I just stayed away from him. We had a guy, Skinner, on the LST the morning [of the] landing. He had gum and all that stuff. He gave everybody a pack of rubbers, you take it and pull it over your barrel to keep the saltwater and stuff out of the barrel. It was just good times and bad times, even on the island. But, I stayed the whole 36 days and I finally got hit. I got hit that morning and went to that MASH unit. When I came off I [had] a cast up to here and got on a ship to get it. I never received a Purple Heart because I didn’t put in for it. There wasn’t any putting in, I was on the roster. I got the book at home and there was two or three of us that morning. One of them put in for it and got it last time at Kansas City. But, I’ll tell you the truth, I would have been ashamed to go up there and try to get something. [They would say] “look at that, where did you come from?” I swear.

FH: So, you got hit the last day, the day you were supposed to leave?

MC: The last morning I wound up in the MASH unit. When I got hit, I don’t know what I got hit by. We were in hand-to-hand combat here, because we had turned our ammunition in. I hadn’t. I had a carbine and a .45 and I had one clip for the .45 that I never did pull. I had three clips, 15

rounds each, to a carbine. I used, I guess, one. The next thing I know, my hand got that big. It just started swelling. So, I went up [to the MASH unit] and they dig in, dig, dig. I got shot one time there, too.

FH: I just want to make sure, Murray, what I am understanding here is your initial job was to be a Pioneer, to bring up supplies for the frontline troops.

MC: What we did, we got it off the ships. It's identified. A crescent [symbol] was food, triple x [symbol] was booze...

FH: What was ammunition?

MC: It would be more or less a signet of what was in there. That is another funny thing that would happen. The guys would be throwing cases, say 40 or 50 pounds, ___ ___ ___ and some son of a bitch would throw an empty case at you. You'd grab it down there, anything to get a laugh.

FH: You were doing this sort of thing early on, with mortars coming down?

MC: That is about the second day, there. I recognize a couple of those guys.

FH: So, shells were flying while you were doing this?

MC: Oh, yes. You would do that and then you'd barrel down. We didn't even have any bunkers. You would get down behind ammunition, whatever we had laying there, or water. I found out something the other day, from this man, they had coconut on this island. These things down here _____ coconuts. Do you have a map like this?

FH: I was wondering if we might be able to borrow that to scan, because that is the kind of map where we really need to show the topography and so forth?

MC: Yes. You will not find any unit on Iwo Jima's, this was a critique it looks to me, except my outfit, the 5th Pioneer Battalion. Because it was the final battle and these are the ones that jumped us right there.

FH: I just want to clarify a few things before we wind up. So, you unloaded the stuff and then you started moving inland.

MC: Right.

FH: Some of the time you would take supplies up to frontline troops?

MC: They mostly sent spotters looking for ammunition and we would help them. That's what we did after we finished. We went in with the infantry and they needed ammunition supplies. We knew where it was at. We would send troops back down.

FH: At the same time, or periodically, you would end up on the frontline?

MC: Oh, yeah.

FH: Just like the normal infantry.

MC: Right. One day we were called to the cemetery. We went down, our cemetery was right in here. It was pretty calm at the time, but they would bring in dead on trucks [End of Tape Side 1].

[Tape Side 2, talking already in progress]

MC: called the Dead Man's Quartermaster. If you needed anything, go to the cemetery and found a pair. We had WWI leggings and field shoes, but if you saw a dead Marine with boots, he was an ex-paratrooper. If you saw one barefooted, he was an ex-paratrooper. [People would] steal his boots. Nobody ever really got cannibalistic or anything like that. I never saw any Japanese that were mistreated, except one time. I saw guys pull one's teeth down by the sick bay. He didn't have a toothache until after they finished.

FH: You had mentioned about these pilots that had...

MC: When we finished, the Army came in. The Army was in with their tanks and things to occupy this island.

FH: This was when the island was supposedly secure.

MC: Yes, sir. We had already had B-29 landings on the island and we had these P-51s. One day, it wasn't too far until the end, a beautiful day, and we looked out and somebody said look on at the horizon on the east side. Right across the water they were strung out, that island was eight miles long, airplanes. [We] said, "The damn Japs are coming." But, when they got to the island, one rose up, [they were] P-51s. They put an airshow on for us, boy. Then they came in and landed. The SeaBees had built them quarters. The SeaBees, they were firing their rifles at us for us to get out of the way. We were trying to take the airstrip and they were trying to fix it at the same time. [The SeaBees are] amazing people. If you ever eat with one of the spoons, it could have been a knife the day before, a combat knife. They didn't throw anything away. So, these pilots came in here and we were here. We saw them moving in. They had decks in the tents. Some of them were in pajamas, I swear. But, when I saw them, me and this guy, Foster, were in this bunker, somebody built this bunker. It wasn't daylight, but [one] could hear some rattling going on. Foster woke me up and he was [Mr. Chitty makes a tapping noise] after a big, old tarantula about that long. _____ a place for the cigarette lighter. Foster said, "What the hell is that?" [We] heard this racket. So, Foster went up through the tunnel, they had a tunnel maybe about as long as here. Foster said, "[There is] something going wrong up [there]." So, I said, "Shit. The place is full of Japs." And that is how I knew. So, we started searching the back of that hole and found sandbags that we pulled out. That is when we saw them and those pilots. Those pilots, it was getting daybreak, and they were walking around with their guts hanging.

FH: So, the Japanese went in there and disemboweled them?

MC: They chopped them all to pieces.

FH: How did you get them?

MC: Shot them.

FH: You and others...

MC: Shot them.

FH: How many Japanese were there?

MC: Two hundred, they said. This is their trail. They knew exactly where they were going.

FH: This was near the end of your stay?

MC: This was the last morning. We could have been aboard ship. We had A, B, and Charlie Company, Pioneers, and we were to go aboard the _____. It was sitting there, so some people from each company left. We said, hell, we'll just sit here and enjoy it because the SeaBees down there had a hot-water bath going with that sulfur. They were cooking donuts down there, some bakery outfit. You could smell them all over the island. So, we were going to stay and that is what we ran into the next morning.

FH: How many pilots were [casualties]?

MC: I don't know. I talked to Grady Patterson one time and there was another guy that called me, Murray Price. Do you know Murray Price?

FH: I know of him. I don't know him.

MC: Murray worked for PY [?]. He has a loader and he ended up President over there. Well, he flew B-25s over Iwo during the landing and he called me one time when they started this Freedom Week. Murray and I went down there. They can't have it there anymore. They are going to Camden. Aiken would have been a better shot, I think. I talked to Grady about spending all those hours in the P-51 going all the way to Tokyo and refueling, and all. They were there and we saw them. The MASH unit, I don't know where it was on this island, but I know I was on White Beach. I landed on Red Beach. This is a beautiful beach, beautiful, looked like Daytona. But, this is all solid rock, high. Over here, there wasn't anything but sand. I tried to get some sand from a guy, [but] he didn't come through for me. I got about that much. All these pillboxes and things in here, they had one runway under construction.

FH: These stories that I have read from other people that have written about the Japanese had these bunkers all over the place and they would come out at night. You didn't witness that personally in your actions?

MC: Oh, yeah. I was with a flamethrower unit that burnt them out of the holes.

FH: But, you never were ambushed by them in your units? I've heard other units were.

MC: I don't know. We were on a frontal attack and we would be going this way on your belly.

This side of the island was pretty much flat. This was the 5th Marine Division, then the 4th coming in, then the 3rd came in later. I don't know. I can't really say if I killed anybody because we were in a firefight, and see them drop. That's up on this end of the island, nothing down here. But, I would see guys hit. I saw a guy completely disappear. In fact, Col. C.A. Johnson, 28th Marines, the Colonel was talking to them up in the lines and a damn mortar or something hit him and he just disintegrated. All they found was his watch right in front of him. We had a general, one of the most decorated generals in the Marine Corps, he came up and talked to us. He got hit in the shoulder [and] he didn't even flinch. He just sat down real slow. I can't remember that general's name right now. But, they [WWII vets] are disappearing. We buried two last week. I'm 77 and I'm the baby of my company almost.

FH: I bet.

MC: Our casualties were not all that great in my outfit. We had replacements. My company had 180 people, [the] battalion had 700 and something. I think we lost about 65 people in my company. That was in the first two or three days. I'd say that most of the people killed on the island were done in the first week. Don't you, Bob?

FH: You got wounded, put on a ship, what happened with you after that?

MC: Me?

FH: Yes.

MC: I came on back to Pearl Harbor. I didn't go back aboard ship because I was wounded. I went back because we were leaving. I went to a MASH unit and they took us out of the MASH unit and I went aboard the ship with my company. I had a cast. We left there and we pulled into _____. We were [there] April 1st, April Fools' Day, when the Battle of Okinawa started. Then we left there and we pulled into Pearl Harbor the day Roosevelt died, April 12th. Then we left and we went back to Hilo. We were supposed to go back to Guam and get ready for the invasion of Japan, but we didn't have anybody. So, we went back and rebuilt. The SeaBees had the tents made. They had a fine meal made for us at Battalion _____.

FH: This was at Hilo or Guam?

MC: At Hilo. I didn't go to Guam. We didn't get back there. We didn't have anybody to go back to Guam.

FH: Right.

MC: So, we went back to Hilo and we started training the next morning [at] daylight. The ships started pulling in. We got back there in April and the ships started pulling in for loading. We knew where they were going [Japan]. They were no secret to anybody. It was the only place left. We were down at Hilo and the regiment was up to Parker. [We had] training day in and day out, different terrain.

FH: They didn't give you any R&R [Rest and Relaxation] during that time?

MC: I got five days in a raffle. I went to stay at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel for 25 cents for five days. Oh, they fed us steak. Everybody got to go, but it was a raffle if you wanted to go. We had five days off and that was about in July. When they dropped the [atomic] bomb, [we were in] downtown Hilo. We went to a movie. The movie hadn't even started yet and the lights came up. The colonel was up on the stage and he said, "All the troops report outside, get on all vehicles as they pull up. Ask no questions and get off when they stop." Well, when we got aboard the driver was saying, "We'll have to take you back to your unit." They happened to go by our place, so we

just bailed off. We went in the camp and the troops were around. They had electricity in there. We were in a POW camp, Camp P_____ they called it. It was good enough for us, but not prisoners of war. It was built for Korean prisoners. What happened we do not know. Sometime or another they said they had dropped this bomb. So, we started loading ship. The trucks were loading. Man, we worked around and this was in August. While we were loading ship, they dropped a second one. We pulled out of there before the 1st of September. We got out of there because we went straight to Japan. We combat-loaded and my outfit got in Sasebo on the 22nd of September, _____ . When we went into Tokyo Harbor, the Sea of Japan, they told us, “Now, the Japanese harbor pilots are coming aboard and taking these ships through the minefields.” They said, “We won’t have any harassing [of the Japanese].” We got on the rail [?], they carried us through there, and then we got in LCVPs. We went up to Cement Pond, about seven miles, I think. All of these ships [had] sunk, Japanese ships. It was a sub base, manufacturing place. So, we got in Sasebo. We went in these tunnels. The place was immaculate, but the rats were that long. We stayed in Sasebo until October. The 1st of November we went to Nagasaki. We went from there to Fu_____. That’s where the Japs were bringing their troops back from the islands. We come back down to Sasebo and the POW’s of our own people. I can say this, we never had any trouble out of the Japanese. When we got there, all you saw was their policeman. I have a Japanese samurai sword you can use in your display if you want to. I got it at Iwo.

FH: Yeah, I’d like to borrow it.

MC: We came back down to Sasebo . Then, the break of my life [happened]. They said, “The 5th Division is going home.” I said, “Ooohhh.” I’m whistling in the barracks. We were in a place called the Sasebo Fortress. Sgt. Major Cheerio, I never will forget it, said, “Chitty, what in the hell?” He said, “Where you going?” I said, “We are going home.” He said, “Read the bulletin board.” I went up there and there were about 35 or 40 names on that thing [that] were going to go

back to the 2nd Division. The 2nd was going to stay. They were at Nagasaki. So, they took the guys with the points, the point system came in. I saw a guy that had been over longer than he was. When I enlisted in the Marine Corps, they had the USMC, USMCR [reserves] _____. I checked the top one that said USMC, so I was United States Marine Corps. My enlistment wasn't up until June of that year.

FH: June of '46?

MC: Yes. This was '46. So, I was in Japan for three more months and went down to China. They shot us down to China for a week, or so. We came back up and they said, "Now we have more bad news for you. The Navy took all of the sailors and let them out [of the Navy] and they don't have any ships." [laughs] They had these carriers, they were called the Magic Carpet. My brother was on the Hornet, I've got a big picture of that ship at home. Not the one that was sunk, the CV-12, the 8 was sunk. He went aboard the CV-12 when it was commissioned. He was in a big typhoon. Well, we had a big typhoon at Sasebo. We took trucks and put low-boys on them, put tanks on the low-boys, jeeps in the back, and put them at dead men [?]. Those dead men must have been as deep as you can go. When that wind got into the side of Sasebo, we had 25, 50 foot walls, when they got inside of that thing, boy, it just tore those things [makes noise like wind]. We were up in those Japanese bunkers. When I came back to the States, I never saw a parade. [I] never saw any flag waving. People forgot the damn war. The women looked so ugly, I thought the circus was in town. Because in Australia, I was in Australia for a while, they didn't wear makeup. But, they had all that red stuff [makeup] over here. So, we got into San Diego and got a break. [We] went to the ballgame. [We] went to a restaurant down there; we walked in, three or four of us. I've got a picture of us sitting in a bar down there. I ordered a hot dog, a hamburger, and a bacon, lettuce, and tomato sandwich all at one time. Just taking a bite. We went to the baseball game; we got peanuts, hot dogs, and all. You never know. So, we got a ride. We were going up to [Camp] Pendleton. This man and woman in this car said, "I guess you young men

will go out and get a decent job now.” We were bums already [according to this man and woman].

FH: This was in the spring of '46?

MC: I got back to Boston Navy Yard in April. They sent me to Boston Navy Yard. I met my wife up there when I was up there before. I got married on June 29th, 57 years ago. I left there and went to Parris Island as a Troop Handler. We carried recruits from Parris Island to Camp Pendleton on a troop train. [The Marine Corps was] rebuilding the Marine force. I stayed on that until '48. [I] went back to Rhode Island and was there when the Korean War broke out. Then I went to Korea. [After] I came back from Korea, I went to St. Thomas, the Virgin Islands.

FH: So, you stayed in the Marine Corps?

MC: I stayed in the Marine Corps. I retired on December 31st of '61. All in all, I had a good career. I never had office hours. I never saw the man. I was always on time. I am that way now. If you are going to be there at 10:00, why wait until 10:15?

FH: Yeah, you were here at a quarter to 10, today.

MC: But, I had a good career in the Marine Corps. After I came back to Boston Navy Yard after Korea, I went to Treasure [?] Island as a Troop Handler. I went from there to Camp Pendleton. From Pendleton, I went to the Marine Corps Cold-Water Training center in Bridgeport, California. God, it's a cold place. [I] stayed there a year and went to Recruit Depot, San Diego. That's where I retired, under General Victor Krulack [?]. I've got a picture of me and the General shaking hands. I met a young man there that was in college. It was Krulack's [?] son who became the Commandant. We were out to the tank battalion, do you remember [asking Bob Hughes], and Krulack [?] was there. I showed him a picture of me and his dad, and he just had to have a picture taken with me.

[Bob Hughes]: I have a little thing I would like to mention about that incident out here at the tank battalion. The Commandant, who at that time was Krulack, and a group came down for a

dedication. Five generals were standing in a group talking amongst themselves. I counted there were 15 stars in the group, in the five generals there, including the Commandant of the Marine Corps. Our friend, Speedy Wilson, who I imagine you know who he is, in civilian clothes, no cover, no nothing, just happened to walk up. You never saw five recruits snap to [so quickly] and give him the honor he was deserved. It was the biggest thrill of my life to see the honor and respect they showed to Speedy Wilson.

FH: Yes.

MC: That's just the opposite of Jack Lucas. You ever hear of Jack Lucas, the youngest Marine to ever receive a Congressional Medal of Honor? Jack and I have the same birthday. He was only 14 or 15 at Iwo [Jima]. He smuggled himself aboard a ship, because they had him at Camp Smith. I talk to Jack every now and then. He's selling his medal. You pay Jack to do this, you pay Jack to do the other. You know, Strom Thurmond really insulted me as a Marine that day when he was up there speaking and the Commandant of the Marine Corps introduced him. The Commandant went to his right and took two steps backward, yeah. They were saying call in these generals, General Blunt, and General so forth.... They told him some general at Fort Jackson had reported that he was not there. Thurmond said, "And where would he be?" The guy from Fort Jackson said, "I don't know Senator." He [Thurmond] said, "I'll tell you what, I'll know where he was at when I find him." See [emphasizing his point]. The Commandant is still sitting and he is shorter than his daddy. He [Thurmond] turned around to the Commandant and said, "Okay, young fella, just [makes walking noise] over there and have a seat." The general says please have a seat. I told Ted and them about that [and he] said, "That's alright." But, that's what he [Thurmond] said to Krulack. He had no respect for those officers, Thurmond didn't. When you get old all your sins are forgotten. We had a woman who used to bootleg liquor and send women to the post office, all that stuff, and she lived [to be] 90 years old. [People] said, "Well, there's Mabel, the Lords just waiting on her" – because she lived to be 90 years old. But,

I had a good career. I had three children. One is 54 now, through Charleston. I have a daughter who is a nurse at the Baptist Hospital here in the Emergency Room. I have another son; he is a bug killer. I have three grandchildren. One is a dental hygienist in Charleston. I have a grandson that graduated from Clemson. He is a ceramic engineer. Then I have one that went to Citadel – last August we were down there. His granddaddy went through Annapolis. He had appointment to go to Annapolis, but his calculus wasn't just right. I talked him into going to Citadel. He's 6'3", about 215. He's built. He beat us home from Citadel. He [someone at Citadel] started screaming in his face and he [his grandson] pushed him off. The general down there called his daddy. Fritz [the dad] got all upset with him. But, I wouldn't open my mind, so he said, "I'm going to go to Mississippi." [He wanted to go there] because he had a friend going. Fritz says, "You just want to go down there for that?" So, when he came home, Fritz wouldn't undo it. It broke my heart. So, I had a long talk with him. I said, "He's 18 years old now, Fritz, let him be a man." When I was 18 years old, I was a Staff Sergeant out of combat. So, he's at Ole Miss doing real good. He went to work; he said, "I'll save my money." Well, he had scholarships down there, you see. But, he is doing real well.

FH: When you retired from the military, what did you do?

MC: I went in the Sheriff's Department for about two hours.

FH: [laughs]

MC: They didn't have any cars; you drove your own, down in Aiken. Then I had a service station until the bookkeeper told me I had better close it or I would go naked. So, I went into the insurance business. I stayed with Liberty Life Insurance Company for about five years. I was Staff Manager; I could have been Office Manager. Then I left that and I went to Canteen Corporation, stayed 22 years, a division of TWA.

FH: You lived here in Columbia a lot of that time?

MC: I moved up here in '66, the Irmo area. I'm 77 years old, the 14th of February past. I've had a good life. I have been lucky, like I was saying. I went to Korea. It seems I was put in a non-dangerous spot sometimes, you know. It's just like that morning – we lost 8 killed and 30 wounded the last morning. It seems I got this before the big thing started. But, I think it came home to me in 1994 when my mother fell and broke her hip and I had her until she passed away in '99. That was the greatest part of my life, that I was able to take care of my mother. I'll say this about the services: I've gained a lot of respect. I don't believe women being in combat. This young lady [Jessica Lynch], did you read the paper this morning? She killed those guys. I think they ought to give it everything. The Marine Corps, that I know of, do not send people [women] into combat. She wasn't going to go to combat, she was in a maintenance unit that was in combat. I just don't believe in the women being in there. This child, the state gave her a complete scholarship to West Virginia. I choke up every time I think of that child.

FH: It is amazing that she survived.

MC: You got to survive. The government doesn't teach you [how] to survive. You teach yourself to survive. Like Bob [Hughes], he is in better shape than I am and has been shot up twice in the legs. The Lord has been trying to slow him down, but He can't do it. [laughs].

[End of Tape]