

**This is an interview being conducted at the Indian Prairie Library. The name of the veteran being interviewed is Gerry Radice. Gerry's date of birth is [REDACTED]/1918. Kevin Haney is doing the interview, along with Alan Gamauf. The date of the interview is September 2, 2006.**

**Gerry, where were you and what were you doing at the time you decided to go into the Army?**

March 5, 1939, I joined the Illinois National Guard, primarily to learn how to ride a horse. Because at that time the field artillery, in which I became an officer later, was horse drawn. And I became a wheel horse driver, which meant I had the horses closest to the wheel on the lead. We went up to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, and I was the wheel horse driver and I got off the horse after camping. I'm an equestrian, whatever that word is. I became a gunner on the 75mm French howitzer, which was a gun that was used in WWI. By 1940, about a year later, we were mechanized. We had old GMC trucks and Ford trucks and we were able to pull the howitzers around. On March 5 or 6 of 1941, actually, it was in September of 1940, we were told we were going to be federalized and put in active duty. That was going to be November and it was delayed until March. So in March we were federalized, and about two weeks later we went down to Camp Forrest, Tennessee – about the middle of the state. We helped the contractor build the fort, build the buildings, put the roofs on, put the sidings on, make the sidewalks. And at the same time we went into our training of using 105, I mean, well at that time it was 75mm howitzers. And then later on, in 1941, we received the 105's, which was the basic weapon for light field artillery until the end of the war. The other artillery weapon that was used was the 105, but the 155 howitzer. In the Illinois National Guard there were three battalions, three regiments, of artillery. One was a 155 howitzer, and there were two 75 or 105 howitzer. I was in the 124<sup>th</sup> field artillery out of 5200 Cottage Grove in Washington Park, Chicago.

**What were your feelings and what were the feelings of the other guys in the unit when you were federalized. I mean, obviously there was a war going on in Europe. What was the mood or the feeling?**

We didn't know what the hell was going on! It was all strange to us. We were at the bottom of the hill. We didn't know what was going on. All we did was accept what was happening.

**And where were you when Pearl Harbor was bombed and you got the news on that?**

When Pearl Harbor was bombed I was still a Private, which was on December 7, 1941. And it just so happened that, in order to make some extra money, I became a motion picture projectionist. And I was the projectionist for one of the theaters in Camp Forrest. That Sunday night I was projecting. I'm not sure what the movie was, now, but the MP's came in and closed us up and said Pearl Harbor had been bombed, we were at war, and go back to your units.

**So that was the evening of 1941.**

That was about 7:00 Chicago time. 1941.

**And then what happened?**

Well, we just went back to work, back to study and back to learning our trade of being artillery.

**And at this point you were still in Tennessee.**

Yes. This was all in Tennessee.

**And when did you get your first orders to move out?**

Well, actually, we were in Camp Forrest. And when we were there I applied, I think it was in May, I applied to go to Officer Candidate School at Fort Sill. I was accepted, and I went to Fort Sill around the 15<sup>th</sup> of July, 1942. And I graduated October 22, 1942, from Officer Candidate School, Class 35.

**What was Officer Candidate School like?**

It was hell! But we were there to learn, we were there to develop, we were there to do, and we were there to learn why we were doing what we did.

**So you were trained for the field artillery, and was it – a lot of book work, field work – what sort of things?**

We had to learn infantry tactics from a different point of view, and that the artillery supported the infantry. My primary jobs, and all the people at that time, were taught to be observers – to be field artillery observers, to assist the infantry in accomplishing their missions, or their goals of overcoming the enemy wherever we were.

**So as an observer, where would you have been? Would you have been up with the infantry?**

I was with the infantry in all of the invasions except one. I was with the infantry of the lead company of the lead battalion. I was personally as an officer. They would change about every four days – they would change the enlisted men. But they didn't – I'm not sure why – they didn't want the enlisted men to get too scared, I guess it would be.

**So basically you were trained for this in camp.**

In camp both at Camp Forrest, Tennessee, but when I graduated I was assigned to the 7th Division at Camp Luis Obispo, California. From there we went to Fort Ord, California.

Then in May and June – in May of 1943 we went to retake the island of Attu in the Aleutians.

**So you were actually in the Battle of Attu.**

Yes, sir.

**And what was that like? I mean, by the Aleutians we mean the string of islands off the coast of Alaska.**

No, we were 1,000 miles west of Kodiak.

**Way off the coast of Alaska.**

Way off the coast – almost to the international dateline.

**Okay. And you went on to Attu. What were you expecting? What had you been prepared for in terms of given equipment?**

We had just come off the desert, and we were expecting to go to North Africa to be troops that were fighting Rommel. And in place of that, on the boat we went out to San Francisco Bay and we expected to turn left. We turned right and we didn't know where we were going. And there weren't maybe 15 people aboard ship who knew where we were going. It was about a day afterward they told us what we were going to do.

**Did you have any idea that the Japanese, I mean was the public aware that the Japanese had occupied U.S. territory in Alaska?**

The Japanese occupied the island of Attu at the end of the Aleutian chain – not the land of Alaska, but the Aleutian chain. And also the island of Kiska where they had a submarine base.

**They had a submarine base there. And you were aware of that before you got on the boat, but you didn't know where you were going.**

We were not aware of where we were going when we got on the boat. It wasn't until about the next morning that we were going northwest, and that's when the officers were called together and told, and the officers told the enlisted men. And the enlisted men said what in the hell were we going to do now!

**[Alan Gamauf speaks: Was your artillery with you on board ship?]**

The answer is yes. We had LST's that had weapons and trucks. But right now I'm vague about that, too. We had LST's that had – they had 1 battalion of 105's and the trucks, too, to drive the guns off the ship onto the land. On the liberty ship I was on, I don't know. We had men on the liberty ship – both infantry and support groups. When we got

to Attu, there were LSM's and LST's. When we hit the beach – the ship I was on went to the wharf and we'd get up on the wharf – I mean some of us did. The rest of us were out in the bay, loading off the liberty ship on to the LSM's to take us ashore. It was really a disorganized – it was the worst failure the War Department ever had in its history. There's a book on it called "The Thousand Mile War in the Aleutians," and it says in there that we were ill prepared, ill organized – I'm trying to think of other words that were said. We didn't have the right equipment for Attu. We didn't have the right boots, we didn't have the right clothing, we still had suntans, we didn't have wool clothing. We had blankets when we needed sleeping bags.

**What were the temperatures like when you got to Attu?**

40's, 50's. It was cold. The whole Aleutian chain out there is foggy. And for May and June through the end of August, after we went into Kiska, we didn't have 15 to 20 days of sunshine. We would occasionally have sunshine during the day, but the fog would come in and it would just blow the sunshine away. And we would have low hanging clouds. It was cold and the wind was always blowing. It was a hell of a way to learn how to fight a war!

**Did you get any opposition from the Japanese initially? Or when did you first encounter Japanese?**

We got ashore without too much trouble. It was only the next day when we were advancing up the hills. And I cannot think right now of the names of all the hills that were there. It was when we hit their gun positions we encountered the Japanese. And we had artillery. We had a hell of a time getting the artillery ashore, and getting the artillery in place to assist the infantry. It was because there was tundra there. And tundra is about three or four inches thick and then there is water. And you'd sink into it. Even the cat – the small caterpillar – had a hell of a time tracking.

**It was a kind of desolate marsh.**

It wasn't a marsh. It was mountains and very little stuff grew. It didn't have much roots. There were no trees. It was rock, tundra and very low grass – it didn't have much sunshine to grow for a long time.

**You'd sink into the tundra because it was wet.**

That's right. You sat down on it and when you got up your ass was wet. It was that simple.

**And did you find the Japanese – was it pretty tough resistance, I would imagine?**

We didn't know what it was like. We just went ahead. It was very difficult. They were dug in. They were expecting us. They resisted us. It was a hell of a way to learn how to fight. We weren't trained for that kind of activity. We were trained for the desert. But

being the average American man can assimilate to his new conditions. We had a bunch of guys who were from Texas, Oklahoma, California, Nevada, Arizona. They were all farmers and off the ground, and they just knew how to make things work. We city boys didn't know our asses from a hole in the ground.

**[Alan Gamauf: What was the strategic importance of this island?]**

It had an air base. It had an air field in which a plane could take off. The Japanese didn't have it very long and they didn't improve it. We improved it – not we, but the Army Air Force at that time sent out planes west to observe what was going on north, west and south of Attu and Kiska.

**How long was the Battle of Attu really going on in terms of ...**

The battle was supposed to take a week. It took about six weeks. It was toward the end of June that we actually secured the island.

**About six weeks.**

The end of June sometime.

**And did any of the Japanese actually surrender, or were there a lot of suicides?**

There were very few prisoners. They died in their sense of duty. We had to kill in our sense of duty.

**And after you secured Attu you were part of the invasion force or liberation force for the island of Kiska.**

I did not get to Kiska. I personally didn't get to Kiska. Our division sent a combat team along with Canadian troops to land on the north side of Kiska. Then they went south to where the Japanese submarine base was.

**Where were you at this point?**

I was still on the ship. We did not go ashore at Kiska. I'm not sure which of our division went ashore. I'm not even sure if our artillery went ashore. We didn't know what was there, and there was no place as far as I knew to land. But the Japanese would not defend something coming from the north. They would defend coming from the south. We came from the north over the hills and there was no defense. The only opposition was with each other in the fog, because we didn't know where the other was. I was not on Kiska.

**So you were, then, assisting building the air field?**

No. We were just there waiting for the next orders. There were engineers that built the air field – I mean, that rebuilt the air field. They put these metal landing gears that fitted

together for about 5,000 feet. And each of us took a tour of duty higher and higher – about 2,000 feet high – for about a week, about five days, just to observe what was going on, to make sure there were no ship had fallen out of radio contact, which was maybe about five miles away from where we were down the side of the hill, down to where the Division Headquarters was.

**Okay. And when did you get orders to move out from Attu?**

I don't know when we moved, when we got orders. I know we left Attu, I'm going to say we moved around the first of September of 1943, and went south to Hawaii.

**Now what was Hawaii like – I mean compared to Attu?**

Exact opposite. It was warm. We had our khaki's. We moved into a Schofield barracks area and began our normal training of shooting and observing. We just got up every day, went and trained and went back and slept. We did this until the end of 1943. Because we knew we were going to have another invasion. We were planning for it. The other invasion was going to be Kwajalein. We were there first in 1944.

**What was it like being in Hawaii just two years after Pearl Harbor?**

It was heaven! It was heaven.

**Okay. So the next invasion was of that island, and what was that like?**

Kwajalein. That was an atoll in the Marshall's. It was at the south end of the Marshall atolls. Eniwetok was at the north end. The marines went in on the north end and we went in on the south end. The marines had very little opposition up there. We had a lot of opposition. They had well defined pill boxes, machine guns and all the rest of the stuff they could fire at us. In the Kwajalein operation I was assigned – I didn't volunteer, I was assigned – to a Navy ship. I was assigned to the USS San Francisco. There were three of us that were assigned from each of the battalions to observe from Navy ships to observe Navy gunfire on the atoll. And when the troops got ashore to assist them in the light 105 howitzers firing. Because the atoll was about 20' high off the water. It was almost straight shooting. What we needed was to land the rounds on top of or in front of to distract the people inside the pill boxes so that our troops could overtake them.

**So you were actually helping to direct the naval gunfire at that point?**

Before the Army landed. Yes. After the Army landed, then I directed the field artillery.

**Was that from the ship again?**

No. I was up in the air. I flew in a Navy airplane. The cruisers at that time had observation planes, called SOC's, Sopwith Camels. They were World War I airplanes – they were pontoons. They could land on water and be picked up on water. The function

at that time was they were catapulted out up in the air, flew around, did our job, came back and landed on the water, taxied over to the ship. The ship picked us up and put us back in the catapult.

**So you were directing the Army artillery fire from the plane.**

From 1,000 to 2,000 feet up. We were out of the line of fire. One of our guys was killed because the captain, I think from the 31<sup>st</sup>, he should have turned right and the pilot turned left and got hit by our own fire and died. I was shot down about day 7 or 8. The plane we were observing in was at 500 feet. We were putting fire on this island and we were about 500 feet. The SOC's, 13 cylinder engine, the only way the pilot and I could hear each other was through the radio because the noise was tremendous. It was on the 8<sup>th</sup> day or something. I had a brand new Ensign, just out of San Francisco, he was the pilot. It was his first flight in combat. He had been trained to be catapulted off, except in the Pacific in Honolulu, but not in combat. I had the other two guys who were pilots, they flew me, they were all right. And this guy was okay, except we were going only about 500 feet and all of a sudden the engine stopped because the machine gun on the ground caught us and hit us, and the machine gun stopped and it was quiet. He turned to me and asked what to do now. I said, get us down in the water and don't kill us! We landed maybe a couple of hundred yards off the shore, and the machine gun came after us and we went over the side into the water. By that time the PT boats – at that time they were circling on guard duty to see what was happening to be sure nobody was coming into the lagoon. They got between us and the shore and peppered them with the machine gun while the LCM came and dragged us out of range of the machine gun on shore.

**An LCM is a boat or plane?**

It's a Landing Craft Medium. They had LCI's, LCM's, LCMH's and LST's. Each of them would carry infantry, a truck, a vehicle or a gun to the shore.

**Okay. So the PT boat gave supporting fire.**

They kept the fire down while the LCM pulled us out of the way. It towed us back to the ship – to the San Francisco. The San Francisco picked us up. And just as the pilot put the hook on the plane, the pontoon sank. Because just as they pulled us up out of the water, the pontoon had machine gun holes in it with water dripping out. They put us back on the catapult, and the mechanics went to work and it was fine the next day.

**Were you up with the same pilot the next day?**

No. I went up with a different pilot the next day. In those days they put us on the water if we had to take off from the land if the ship was anchored. You didn't have to go out into the ocean. It could catapult us. When we were on the sea they catapulted. When we were in the lagoon they pushed us out.

**How long did that battle go on?**

I think we secured Kwajalein in about two or three weeks. We were done by the end of February, 1944.

**Were you actually on the island after that?**

No. I was on board ship.

**Okay. So you never set foot on Kwajalein.**

No, I never set foot on Kwajalein. I was on the water at Kwajalein (laughs).

**You got shot at from Kwajalein! And where were you sent to, then?**

I was still on the San Francisco, and whenever they decided to take the troops back, they put the troops and the artillery back on the liberty ships – the LST's – I was on the San Francisco. And the San Francisco became part of the Navy task force that went to bomb Truk. We bombed – it was either the end of February or the first part of March that we bombed Truk. We sank about half of the Japanese Navy, and they're still there.

**Permanently, yeah.**

I got back to my outfit sometime in April. I was still on board ship. I was on board ship about three months – January, February and March.

**And where did you finally meet up with your outfit again?**

Back in Hawaii. We came into Pearl Harbor and I waited and they called me up. They cut orders and took me off the ships and put me back in the battalion.

**And how long were you in Hawaii then?**

We were in Hawaii until about September, I'd say.

**September of 1944?**

We were originally intended to be in position to support troops for another invasion. When we got there we did not disembark, because they didn't have the resistance they thought they would have. We were still on board, so they said we'd go to Truk. They changed their minds again and said we'd be going to the Philippines.

**So this is now about ...?**

This is roughly about the first week of October of 1944.

**What were your observations – obviously you were part of the very early invasion in Attu – was the military getting more used to doing island operations?**

Yes. We were well trained at Fort Ord to go on and off liberty ships. But at that point at Fort Ord we thought we were going to Africa. When we got to Attu and went to Hawaii, we had to get readjusted to island invasions and water invasions. In order to get the vehicles and trucks at that time we used Ducks. I don't know if you've ever gone to the Dells, but they have ducks that go in the water. In Hawaii is where we got ducks. We could put the guns, the howitzers, on the back of the ducks and bring them ashore, take them off, then go back and get ammunition for it. That was the only way at that time of getting the artillery ashore and getting the ammunition and supplies ashore, was by ducks. We still had LST's, but there was no way to get LST's close to the islands on Kwajalein. We did on Kwajalein itself, and the 200 or so small islands. The ducks came ashore, the LST's came ashore and brought the guns to the shore, and the ducks brought them to where they were supposed to be. Because there were no Japanese on both islands. And we had artillery fire from those islands onto the atoll at Kwajalein itself, which was about a half a mile away or something like that.

**So now it's about October, or so, of 1944, and you're going to what island in the Philippines?**

At that time we were on our way to Truk, and finally we got orders to go to Leyte. And we were on LST's at that time.

**And what was Leyte like?**

On Leyte we got on shore all right. It was maybe about a mile before we met any resistance, and that's when we had to fight our way through jungles. It was a quarter of a mile at a time because it was jungle. You didn't go far in the jungle – you had to make sure you knew who was in front of you and who was behind you (laughs).

**What was the visibility like?**

It was jungle – hard to see. One hundred yards or so. It was slow.

**[From Alan Gamauf: What was the temperature like?]**

It was hot. Humid. It was the Philippines, not white man country. I got dengue fever about the fifth week. Dengue fever is a fever – I don't know how you get it, but when you get it, it makes your bones ache and your muscles ache. And you hope you die. You hope you die. It just tears you apart. It lasts for about 7 or 8 days and it goes away, and it leaves you weak. I could not pick up a pencil after dengue fever. It took me about three days before I could finally start eating a little bit. And about a week more before I could walk.

**[Alan Gamauf: Do you think the Japanese responded the same way in the Philippines?]**

They were there and they had it. They acclimated to the disease or the bug, and they were all right. But it was jungle fighting from trees to ground.

**[Alan Gamauf: A lot of casualties?]**

Yes. I'd say a lot of casualties. We had casualties all the way. We didn't have as many casualties on the east part of the island as we did on the west part of the island, because they were more fortified there. They also had better trained troops on the west part. I was wounded on December 22, 1944, just east of the city of Orloc, which is on the west part of Leyte. I was shot in the leg just below the knee.

**What was medical care like? What was the routine when somebody got hit?**

The people who were our medics were the best people in the world---end of quotation. When somebody was hit they went after them to get them out of the way. They didn't have guns. They just went in to help us get back and get well. When the Navy medics and the Army medics that I met and saw operate, I'd give my life for them. Because they were giving their lives. They were making sure that those who were hit and could be saved were brought out. (pauses briefly) I'm starting to cry a little bit. The medical personnel were always in the front lines in the infantry battalions. You couldn't ask for better people. There's no way you could find better people who were trained to do their jobs. Theirs was not to fight. Theirs was to save American lives if they could. And I'm sure they did. I know they did. That's all I can say.

**[Alan Gamauf: Gerry, did you know immediately that you were shot?]**

Well, yeah I knew immediately. Because I had been standing up. [The reason he was standing was because he had just pulled a wounded guy to safety. No one else has been told this]. We had been ambushed and we did it to them and they did it to us. That's war. We were going along this trail and got ambushed, and I got hit just below the knee because the machine gun was about 18" high, and wham! I landed over and fell, and I didn't know what had happened. I tried to move my leg and it was tough. As I moved the machine gun came after me. We were on a little bit of a hill. I kept on going down and the machine gun came after me. But fortunately for me it was shooting high because it couldn't see me until I got into a ditch. And about that time, or maybe about a half hour later, or whatever time it was – a reserve company came forward and helped push them back. In that particular skirmish – from what I could see; I was one of them – we had about 11. On Leyte there were about nine of us along side the road waiting for the Jeep ambulance to come back. And the Jeep could take four people. I was the least wounded. There had to be nine of us. I was the least wounded of the group that was there. There were two Jeeps that came back and I had to wait for a third one. I had my pistol gun. It was a 45 – it shot 45 caliber – for self-defense protection. That was the only time in my life I smoked a cigarette! I went through a pack in twenty minutes!

Because you're in shock and don't know it. I had taken the bandage pack that was in my pack and I shoved it in my leg. And I could put my whole hand in the back of my calf to stop the blood. Somebody had to put a bandage on to hold it in. And I just waited to get back. They came and got me and brought me back to the hospital area.

**[Alan Gamauf: Did you know where the enemy was when you got shot?]**

No. They were well hidden.

**[Alan Gamauf: Did you know like how many yards they were or anything like that?]**

Twenty yards at most.

**[Alan Gamauf: Really? That close!]**

On the west part of Leyte we had a lot of close-in fighting. It was pretty brutal. Yes, it was Indian fighting. It was that simple.

**How long were you in the hospital?**

Well, they sent back all the way to Hawaii for about three weeks, then they put me back on a ship and sent me back to the outfit because they didn't have replacements in the Pacific – anybody who could walk was sent back. In Europe they had replacements because they needed replacements. In Europe they fought by the miles – miles here, miles there. In the Pacific we fought by the yards – a yard, ten yards. Occasionally we'd get a half-mile, quarter-mile. But there were days we didn't get that far.

**So they packed you up and shipped you off. Where was your unit when you rejoined them?**

They were still on Leyte. I think I rejoined them around the end of February, 1945. They were getting ready for the next invasion. The next invasion was Okinawa. And I joined them there.

**And when did you start landing on Okinawa?**

On Easter Sunday, April 1, 1945, 8:00 in the morning.

**Memorable. Did you see any of the Japanese Kamikaze attacks coming in?**

We did. It was the greatest armada of invasion ships after Normandy. It was the greatest armada of all navies. As I've told people before, I went ashore on the fifth wave and I'm on the shore and look around and see the LST's miles this way and miles that way, and I hear popguns going off. And I look around and see all these ships and say, what the hell am I doing here! The trucks are coming ashore, the guns are coming ashore, the supplies

are coming ashore and everything else is coming ashore, and you see this stuff on the ocean, when the Kamikazes came, not the day I was there – a couple of days, two or three days later – when the LST was still there unloading. Thank God the Kamikaze missed us. It hit an ammo dump about 300, 400 yards ahead. It was just a normal day.

**I'll bet. Yeah. So this was massive compared to the other invasions you were involved in.**

Massive. We had four divisions landing side-by-side – two Army and two Marines. We went ashore, and we got to crossing, the 96 turned right, we turned right in the middle and the two Marine divisions turned right to go south on Okinawa.

**What was the terrain like in Okinawa? Was there less jungle?**

Like Ohio, like Illinois. There were hills – maybe 3,000 – 4,000 feet high. I saw hills coming up. I didn't go back to check them.

**It wasn't like a jungle.**

No, no. It was landscape. It was valleys and mountains.

**Roughly similar to the United States – Kentucky or something like that.**

Kentucky, parts of Wyoming, California.

**What was the Japanese resistance like?**

We had the worst casualties of the war on Okinawa – almost 38,000 fellows got hit. It was yard by yard. They were well dug in, well entrenched. They had artillery and mortars. They knew what they were going to do. They made us fight for every inch, and they did.

**[Alan Gamauf: Did you get a lot of air cover?]**

We didn't need air cover on Okinawa. What I'm trying to say, we did not need air cover like they did in Europe because we were fighting a normal textbook war on Okinawa – land by land by land by land. We had observation – air observation – both Army L19's were up there to be sure. But I was on the ground. I was on the ground at Leyte and I was on the ground at Okinawa.

**[Alan Gamauf: Did you get a lot of naval?]**

No, after we landed. There was naval gunfire before to try to soften them up. But once we were ashore it was 105 and 155. And the way we were going – further south on the south end of Okinawa – the Navy was still shooting at targets there that they could see to

knock them out or keep them down, or whatever. But those were twenty, thirty miles away.

**What were your duties on Okinawa? Were you commanding a battery?**

I was still a forward observer. To be egotistical, I was the best forward observer in our Army battalion. I was known that if you put the flag down, he hit the target.

(Tape turns to side 2)

**[Alan Gamauf: So you were a forward observer. You would radio back to your ...]**

I had direct radio contact with our S3, which is the operation. So I could shoot any of our three batteries – we had A, B and C batteries – wherever I wanted to. They had twelve guns, each of them. I could shoot a 12 gun salvo, a four gun salvo or a 1 gun salvo.

**[Alan Gamauf: So what were your instructions back? What would you say?]**

The infantry would get me out there so I'd say there was machine gun there or a gun position there.

**[Alan Gamauf: How would you give the coordinates?]**

We always had one shot out there, and I'd tell that shot where to go.

**[Alan Gamauf: They'd shoot one shot there and you'd say okay, left 100 yards or ...] [Kevin Haney: You would adjust the coordinates.]**

I would adjust the fire to the target. In artillery you either sense where it is or you direct. If you sense, it's 50 right. But if you say left 50, they move left 50. But right now, which I haven't done in a hell of a long time, I would direct fire. I would tell them where to go – left 50, left 100, left 200, up 100, down 100. I would direct where I wanted it to go. I would not sense where the shot landed in regard to the target.

**So you were in Okinawa when the war in Europe ended.**

Yes. The war ended in Europe on May 8, I guess it was, of 1945. And I was in Okinawa on April 9. I was called up front because I was back at the infantry battalion just for a rest day. They had changed the way the company was working. I came back and put in one day to go up the next day. And the company that had one of our other lieutenants and he was killed. And so they sent Radice and I was going up front to take his place. And I had my sergeant behind me and the two guys who were carrying the radio and batteries to help protect us. And we had air bursts up ahead of us that killed the sergeant behind me and put a lot of shrapnel on my back and knocked me down, etc., and injured the other two enlisted men. I did what I could for the sergeant. The medics came and got the three of them. I picked up the radio, saw that it was working and went up to join the

other infantry. And as I said in there someplace I was hit, but I could walk and I could talk so I went ahead and conducted artillery fire to assist this company to continue on against their resistance. About an hour or so later I collapsed, and they brought me back to the medical station and I was there for a couple of days and went back up front.

**So you were basically doing – you started out with these guys assisting you and after the artillery burst you were wounded and they were so wounded they had to be taken back.**

One was killed and the others went back. I carried the radio and did what I had to do.

**So you did the work of the whole team.**

I was the team!

**You were the team and wounded besides! After that you were taken back to the hospital, and how long were you there?**

I got back – I'm trying to think of the base, the advance hospital or the forward hospital; I've forgotten. And then I got back to my battalion to rest and get re-acclimated, because I had been under stress. And then about two days later – I was supposed to be there about four or five days – we had somebody else get killed, and I was the only officer available for forward duty. So I went back again to the front lines.

**So basically they weren't rotating you off of Okinawa.**

They needed officers. They needed people who could conduct artillery fire.

**So you were back on the front line.**

**[Alan Gamauf: What kind of condition were you in to go back on the front line? I mean, after the shrapnel injury.]**

I had no idea. I still had bandages on my back. And not only that, about three days after I got back on the front lines I got hit in the arm. As I tell people, I got wounded three times, but I have two purple hearts.

**And how long were you up at the front again at that time?**

I'm waiting for something. I'll say it again. I got two purple hearts.

**[Alan Gamauf: Where was your third one?]**

Well, it all happened about 10:00 in the morning, and we got slightly busy the rest of the day and we weren't looking – medic put something on it. (all chuckle) We weren't worried about purple hearts. We just wanted to have a cup of coffee and a good night's sleep. I mean between 10:00 in the morning at 6:00 at night, too much happened. As I

say, we didn't have time to do the paperwork. I wasn't worried about getting another purple heart or anything else.

**Then you continued along for the rest of the battle of Okinawa?**

Yes. I was with them. I was in a lot of close situations – never hurt. The infantry people I was with were wounded and died. And I was fortunate.

**Your luck was holding at that point.**

My luck was holding.

**When did the fighting wind down on Okinawa, or did it actually stop?**

June 21<sup>st</sup> – it's amazing how you can remember certain days and forget others – but June 21<sup>st</sup> was when they said Okinawa was secured. I believe it was on the 20<sup>th</sup> that Lieutenant General Buckner was killed.

**By secured did they mean the Japanese were all ...**

They were still fighting, but we had command of the island. We were all the way down to the south end, to the water. And the Marines going north had very little trouble. It was the south half of the island where they had two air strips, and the two bases where ships could come in was where we were at.

**Were you in Okinawa, then, for the remainder of the war until September?**

I was in Okinawa, I think it was until – what happened to me was I had the second highest number of points that would give me authority to go back for R&R. The guy that had more points than me – was about 35 and had five or six kids – so he got more points than I did. But I had 112 points or something like that because of my service, my wounds, my purple hearts and my bronze stars.

**So when did you actually leave Okinawa?**

I left Okinawa August 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup>. I was aboard the Navy ship to go back to San Francisco when they dropped the bomb. I went back to San Francisco and got there about September 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup>.

**What was the impact – did you understand the significance when the bomb was dropped; the first bombing then the second bombing? Did you hear about the first bombing and then the second bombing and realize pretty much it would be the end at that point?**

We didn't know what was happening. On Okinawa we seldom got information because we were too spread out. It wasn't that the commanders didn't have the information. But

to get it down to the guys on the front line where the guys did the work – they seldom got it. It got down (indistinct), they didn't – the commanders, I'm not sure what they knew or when they knew, but from the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> as I just read in the paper today, was when they signed to end the war on the Missouri.

**So you were aboard ship going back to the States when the war ended, effectively.**

Yes.

**And I suppose the mood was pretty good at that point.**

The mood?

**The troops were pretty happy to hear about that.**

I don't know if happy is the word. Relieved would be a better word. Relieved. Relaxed – not relaxed yet. For everyone who had been through what we had been through on Leyte and Okinawa in such rapid succession, there was stuff that happens to your mind and body that takes a long time for it to get out. When I got back here to Chicago, I stopped in to see the psychiatrist at the hospital. I said I just want to know a couple of things. He said, what. I said, if you just got back from being on Okinawa and Leyte, you were shot three times and got two purple hearts. How am I going to take civilian life? That was one thing. I've got to go back more. On Hawaii I was selected – I didn't volunteer – I was selected to go to Ranger school.

**Oh. Okay.**

I'm a nice, quiet guy. I don't get mad often. But by the third week of school – I'll never forget it, I'll use nasty words, the staff sergeant. He told me, Lieutenant, you're going to have to learn to kill otherwise you're going to get killed.

**And you had already been to Attu at that point.**

Yes. I had been to Attu and I had been involved at Kwajalein. He said, Lieutenant, you're going to have to learn to kill or you're going to get killed wherever you're going.

**And this is after two major battles you'd been in!**

That's right. But I said, I'm not a killer. He said, I'll tell you again. You're going to have to learn to kill. The reason I'm saying it this way is it took him one more week before I wanted to kill him!

**He was good at it then.**

That was his job! His job was to try to get me to want to kill him. He said, Lieutenant I'm now off of you. You're all right.

**[Alan Gamauf: So you became a Ranger.]**

I didn't say that. I went to Ranger school and I graduated. I didn't say I became a Ranger. They taught me how to kill. On the ship coming back from Okinawa, they got a few of us together and were talking to us. And they said, you're going back to the States where they don't understand what you have been through. And you who have been killing are going to have to learn not to kill, or to hurt, but to walk away. I'm going to say it again. They knew we had learned to kill. And this is what is happening in Iraq and Afghanistan today. Your stomach tells you. There's this small thing in the small of your back that tells you to watch out. Stop or whatever it is. It tells you that. If you don't listen you die. And if somebody comes along and does something, or there's a sound or something like that – all you're thinking about is survival for yourself. Survival for yourself and the people you're with. So when I came back, you ask me, I had to be very careful. I had to take a second longer to react. I didn't just react. And this is why, when you talk about people who have been in combat – I'm not talking about the people who have been in combat areas like support groups who are helping. They're doing a wonderful job, because every infantryman who's up in the front has 18 people behind him for support, at least, I think. But when you're in the front lines, and you're with 8, 10, 12, 15 guys, you're watching out for one another, not for yourself. And I tell you there were people who were watching out for me because I was their savior. I was their God help. And they needed me and they wanted me. Every time they needed me I was there. So, when you're talking about what it was like when I got back, it was strange. When you're used to seeing people you have breakfast with in the morning be dead by the afternoon or the night, and this happens day after day, week after week, month after month -- you go three months on Okinawa, you go two and a half months on Leyte, you go a week and a half on Kwajalein and you go six weeks on Attu. And on Attu at the very beginning you don't know what the hell you're doing. You have no idea what war is like. When they talk about a mismanaged war, what a mismanaged invasion Attu was. But, you know what? We had to learn. We had to learn. And all I can tell you is that the Seventh Division did a fine job.

**[Alan Gamauf: Gerry, you received the bronze star?]**

Well, this is the purple heart. This is what I got that you can see in there that somehow they put my name on the back. This is the bronze star. I have to tell you, I do not know what I got the bronze star for. I got two of them. I have no idea what I got the bronze star for. Because when I got wounded in the leg and I was doing things before and after I got shot, they awarded me a bronze star. And they also did the same thing on Okinawa. I never saw the orders, so I have no idea. Somebody sent me a silver star. I have no idea what the hell was going on. I had no idea what I got the medals for. All I know is that this particular thing came in the mail and it says all things – silver star, the Pacific campaign – I have no idea what it is for. They came in the mail. I got them. And, of course, the most important things I'm qualified on the carbine, I'm qualified on the rifle, and I just barely qualified on the pistol. (all chuckle)

**So that's why you conducted artillery fire! (all chuckle)**

Those are the things that happened to me.

**[Alan Gamauf: So your service career is approximately what – five years?]**

We started in September of 1940 and I got out in April of 1946.

**[Alan Gamauf: In 1946. Were you married at the time?]**

No. I was married in November of 1946.

**What were you doing from the end of the war to April of 1946?**

Well, what happened is I went to Fort Sheridan, Illinois. They were working on my teeth, and the dentist in September wrecked my teeth. I mean, it took me three months to get my teeth in my mouth fixed up. It was January 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup>, I don't remember what it was, I was released from active duty. And then I went on leave until April 16<sup>th</sup> of 1946. In the meantime I was going to school, trying to get into DePaul University and get an education.

**What was it like readjusting? Were there a lot of veterans at DePaul at the time you were there? Did people seem to understand the war in terms of what you went through?**

People did not understand the war. They understood rationing. They understood not having. They didn't understand what it was to be in a war condition – to get up in the morning and wonder whether you'd be alive that night. The support troops that were supporting the infantry didn't have it quite that bad of a situation. They were doing a war job. The infantry, the artillery, the engineers and medics were doing the war fighting. We knew what it was to have the enemy in front of us. Today we don't know where the Army is. Those guys have a different war to fight. And I'm for them. I'm for them. I'm sorry – you asked me something else.

**Just were there other veterans there at the time?**

Oh. At DePaul, at every university that was around at that time. The GI Bill was the best thing that ever happened to us at that time. All I can tell you is that I got a Bachelor's degree from DePaul. I got a Master's degree plus at the University of Chicago. All I can tell you is Uncle Sam got his money back a lot more times than what he had invested in me! And not only in me, but everybody who was able to take advantage of the GI Bill. The men who came back from the war – the men and women who came back from the war – knew they had to have an education in order to survive what was coming. We had been away for one or two years – it had been five years for me, five and a half years. I didn't know what was going to happen. I did know I'd need an education. I'd gone to DePaul before I went in the Army, so I was eligible to go when I got back. So I was able

to get back and get into a classroom. And all I can say is that the guys who came back were the most dedicated men in the world. I use the word men – men and women. They knew what they were there for. They knew they needed an education.

**Do you feel your wartime service affected your views to this day and shaped your attitude toward the world?**

The Army helped me grow up. The war helped me grow up. The war helped me meet people in many activities, many levels, many professions, many trades. It enabled me to see chaplains of every religion. And I never saw a bad one – I never saw a bad chaplain. I never saw a bad guy who said he wished he wasn't there, but he was there because others were there and he couldn't leave them alone. He couldn't leave them. And that's what we had in the Pacific. We had a "family" if you want to say that. In my particular battalion we had 53 officers in front of the battalion. And from October of 1942 when I joined them until January of 1945 – not quite three years later – we had another 53 come through. And when Okinawa was over on the 21<sup>st</sup> of June we had only 13 officers in our battalion, that needed 53 officers to function, and I was one of the 13. When I got this purple heart and I opened it up in the Post Office, I began to cry. And the woman there says, why are you crying. I said, yes, I did earn this purple heart. And I was wounded. But I was not wounded as seriously as others. And I was not wounded as seriously as those who died. And this isn't the only time it's happened in situations like that. It had to be 10, 15, 20 times where I was not wounded. Others were. Others died. Why God has let me live, I don't know. I'm thankful. He put his hand on my shoulder – He took it off a couple times – but He let me live. I'm almost 88 years old. I pray for the people in Afghanistan and Iraq, and every other place that our troops are. I hope they come back. I'm just glad to be alive. That's all I can say.

**Anything else you'd like to say in closing?**

The only thing I want to say in closing is that America did a great deal for the world in 1940, 1945, 1946, and in the 50's, and in the 60's, in Korea and Viet Nam. So much they earned, but they never will really be thanked by those in the world. When our Congress, when our government, put troops in Afghanistan and Iraq and then forgot about them – which is the current condition, in my opinion; they don't support them the way they should be. They, Congress and America, do not know the importance of our military today. We have the finest military people in the world today. Men and women who are doing the job to keep America safe for America, and safe for the forces that want to overcome America, both internally and externally. But the rest of the world does not have what America has, which is freedom. And because of that a lot of them are realizing that the price of freedom is very high. The price of freedom is not only high in money. It is high in mind. It is high in hearts. It is high in souls. Those of us who think that we don't need to fight for our rights should thank the front lines and get reacquainted with life. I'm a retired Lieutenant Colonel of the U.S. Army. I'm a college professor in accounting for 43 years. I pray for our country. I pray for our youth. I pray for those mothers and fathers who don't want to see their children go to war, but should realize that there is a place to be in America. And you have to do it by volunteering. You have to

volunteer to others where others don't want you. I wish more of our politicians had served in the military, and served under combat conditions and realize what it is to be in the front lines and only have the people around you who are your family. And those of us who don't understand what it is to be there, to support our troops, support our family. And I wish they all could come back. This war will not be over soon. It won't be solved in my lifetime, but maybe in the current kids' lifetimes. There are interests out there – economic and financial – that want to curtail or contain America. But there are enough good out there – nobody's going to contain America. We can show the world what freedom really is and hope that more people can be themselves and not be under the rule of a dictator or somebody who is only there for economic or financial reasons. I will now shut up.