Fort Smith Historical Society Oral History Center
World War II Project
Interview with Roy Henderson

RH: My name is Roy Albert Henderson.

JW: And when were you born?

RH: (DELETED CONTENT)

JW: And where were you born?

RH: I was born Barling, Arkansas, Route 1, on the bank of the Vache Grasse Creek, right out in the middle of the Camp, where the Camp is now.

JW: Where Fort Chaffee is now?

RH: Yeah, Fort Chaffee.

JW: What was your parents' names?

RH: My dad's name was Roy, same as mine, Roy, only his name was Alfred, Roy Alfred Henderson. My mother's name was Mary Alice, called Mamie. You want her maiden name?

JW: Yes.

RH: Trotter.

JW: And what did your father do for a living?

RH: Well, my dad, he loved to farm; but the way things were, you couldn't make a complete living farming, so he worked in the coal mines in the winter and farmed in the summer.

JW: Did you have sisters and brothers?

RH: Yeah, I had one brother that was seventeen years older than me and one sister that was fifteen years older than me, but she died when she was twenty years old.

JW: That's quite a spread anyway.

RH: Yeah. I think I was born maybe by accident or change of life or whatever you might want to call it.

JW: Right. So you grew up on a farm more or less?

RH: That's right, absolute farm, that's right. ** (Added by Mr. Henderson) When I go back as far as I remember, we were living on Bluff Avenue, and later on South P Street in Fort Smith. I remember my mother and aunt holding me on an ironing board and giving me caster oil, awful stuff! And I remember when living on South P Street, when I was about 3 and a half to 4 years old, slipping off from Mother, crossing Jenny Lind Avenue to some woods where the streetcar came down through. I wanted to go down to Kresses and buy me a car. So I stood in the middle of the track and the conductor stopped, got out, pulled a weed and switched me with it trying to make me tell where I lived, I would not! He took me in the trolley and set me with a young girl. He stopped on Dotson and told her to run me up to the Chief of Police's house, which she did. Now, that's a pretty good start, far as my landing on Saipan when I was barely eighteen years old, the whole south side of Fort Smith was looking for me. ** 2

JW: And where did you go to school?

RH: I went to school, lived in this valley where the Vache Grasse came down down through the valley called the Union Valley for the first four years. And then after the fourth grade, I had to go to Greenwood. So I went to school from the fifth grade through halfway through the tenth, when I had to move out of the Camp area, then we moved. My dad bought a farm out west of Muldrow, Oklahoma, and I went a year there before I joined the Navy.

JW: Okay. So did you graduate from high school?

RH: I did not at that time; but after I got out of the service, I went back and finished and even got my diploma. They gave me credit for the corps school I went to in the Navy, plus another school that pertained to the medical profession that I went to before I went overseas.

JW: Okay. Did you have any jobs while you were still going to school?

RH: No, I didn't, and that was one of the drawbacks. About the only way I had of making any money is to pick blackberries and maybe sell them for a dime a bucket or hoe corn for somebody else or pick cotton for somebody else, but the work you done at home, of course, that was for your room and board at home.

JW: You were still about high school age when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor?

RH: That's right.

JW: And what do you remember about that day?

RH: Well, that day, like I said, we was moving out of the camp area and we bought this place out on the west side of Muldrow. And four days after we bought the place, the house burnt down. So me and my dad and my brother was out there looking at the ruins of the house. And my uncle come driving in and he said, "The Japanese have just attacked Pearl Harbor," it was on a Sunday. And that's the first I'd heard of it.

JW: Did you know of Pearl Harbor before that day?

RH: Did I know of it?

JW: Uh-huh.

RH: Well, I was pretty much up on that sort of history and geography, I always loved it. Yeah, I'd heard of it.

JW: Okay. There was a lot of people who didn't have an idea of what it was until it got bombed.

RH: I'd heard of it and I knew where it was.

JW: Did you know that day that it was probably gonna get you into some kind of war business later on in life?

RH: Yes, I did, I sure did. 3

JW: Was your brother too old?

RH: Yeah, he was.

JW: Okay. Well, what were you doing about the time you joined the Navy?

RH: Well, after we moved to Muldrow, like I said, I went to school out there. And my dad had went to work at the smelter over here, so it wasn't doing much for him. And I put in a little patch of cotton and I made a little on that that summer, but course, you don't make all that much on that, I think it was five cents a pound. But anyway, somebody told me if I'd come over here at Ward's Ice Cream and wait, there was a room back there, showed me where to go and wait, why, Fred, I forget what his last name was, he'd come in and he'd pick out any extras he might want to work that day. So I picked up a little money that last summer I was home, in that respect, to have a little spending money.

JW: Working at Ward's Ice Cream?

RH: Yeah. I'd go over there every morning and maybe you'd get to work one day a week or two days a week, he'd just come in and pick out the ones he wanted to work that day, rest of us went back.

JW: Just a temporary job?

RH: Yeah, it was just a temporary job, yeah.

JW: Well, I guess the Depression was still--

RH: Yeah, it was still going on. It had lightened up a little bit from what it had been, but we went in the Depression broke because my sister died in '31 and what little bit of money we had in the bank, it took that. There was no insurance back then, and she kind of died unexpectedly. That and her funeral emptied my dad's pocketbook. And then the mine he was working at shut down the following February, so out of a job and out of money; but did have a roof over our head, though, and that made it a lot better than some of them had it.

JW: Well, what caused you to join the Navy? You joined and wasn't drafted, is that right?

RH: That's right. I volunteered when I was seventeen years old. And the main reason I joined, a friend of mine and I, we decided we'd go in. Like I said, spending money was hard to get ahold of and we didn't have what we'd liked to had. So we decided, well, we'll just join the Navy and make our own money because there wasn't no jobs, you couldn't have went out and got a job, maybe one every so often might. So we both went and signed up and our parents signed the deal to let us go on.

JW: Did you sign up in Fort Smith?

RH: Yeah, sure did, down here at the Federal Building.

JW: I see. Then what happened to you?

RH: Well, they shipped us to Little Rock and went through all the 4 passing the physicals and the other stuff we went through with. We stayed in a YMCA and then they put us on a train going to San Diego, California. Seemed like it took about three or four days to make that trip, but we ended up in San Diego there at that station right there at the foot of Broadway there, put us on a bus going over to the boot camp. Drove in the boot camp, everybody was yelling, "You'll be sorry, you'll be sorry."

JW: That was helpful, I'm sure.

RH: Yeah.

JW: So about six weeks boot camp?

RH: No. The normal deal, ours was eight weeks, it had been twelve weeks, but they had cut it back to eight before we got in. I heard later, they cut it back to even less than that.

JW: And do you know what month and year that was?

RH: March, March of '43.

JW: '43, okay. Now, I know you were a corpsman. Did you pick that or did somebody pick that for you?

RH: Well, they give you all these tests in boot camp. And so on my tests and everything, you have an interviewer. And he said, "Well, the test you made here, if you'll put radio signalman down number one, you'll get it because you made good on the test." So I put corps school down second; I don't know why, because I'd never been around anything like that, other than seeing the hospital. I don't remember now what my third choice was; but anyway, this Yeoman, he said, "If you put that number one, you'll get it." But anyway, as you go out the door, there was a Lieutenant Commander setting there. I assume he was a doctor, but he was a Lieutenant Commander, everybody had to stop and talk to him. And he said, "I see you got down corps school here second." So he talked me in the notion of changing it from radio signal school to corps school. So I had to go back over to the Yeoman, and I could tell he thought I was making a mistake; but anyway, I changed it over to corps school. And this guy that I joined with, he did the same thing, only I don't know that that might have been his first choice, I don't know.

JW: So they shipped you to an actual corps school from there?

RH: Yeah. The corps school there was up at Balboa Heights there in San Diego, up on the mountain. There was a U.S. Naval Hospital and there's that old park grounds, they'd had a World's Fair there.

JW: It's a pretty place, isn't it?

RH: Yeah, pretty place; but those old buildings were all real airy and not a very warm place to stay. You know, it gets real cold there at night. We all got that whatever they called it, what was it they called it, catarrhal fever, cat fever, I think is what they called it; but it was just, you know, stopped up with that. 5

JW: How long did corps school last?

RH: Well, I was basically in it because you have to go through a lot of different things. You're on ward duty, and then you're on lock-up ward duty, and then I was even on ambulance call for a month. And we'd go down to the Mexican border and pick up these sailors that got cut up over there and bring them back to the hospital, or anybody else that might get hurt down there; but most of our trips was down there. Sometimes we'd go downtown to a hotel where somebody had hurt theirself in their room or someone cut their foot on glass or whatever.

JW: Do you feel like they actually taught you a lot that was useful?

RH: Well, they taught me a lot more than I knew at the time; but for what I was going to have to face in a few months, it wasn't near enough.

JW: Well, after corps school, where did you go?

RH: Well, I was put on a one man draft to Pearl Harbor.

JW: What is a one man draft?

RH: Well, they just call your personnel office and you catch a deal going to Pearl Harbor. I went over on what I call a garbage scow, and they shipped me to Pearl Harbor to catch on the hospital corps school for this U.S. Naval beach-party thing. So that's actually what I was put into was what they call the U.S. Naval beach-party. It's an amphibious landing party and it's composed of a beachmaster, assistant beachmaster, radio signalman, a doctor and six corpsmen. And you land with the Marines or the Army or whoever you might be working with at the time. The doctor and the

head corpsman would go in the third wave, and the rest of us would follow in the seventh assault wave. And it was one of the toughest things I've ever done in my life.

JW: Sounds like to me the way they're putting you in is that they are giving some time for the casualties to occur and then bring you in, which isn't a very uplifting thought.

RH: No, it isn't. And the rough part of getting in when you're under fire, you, of course, got fire going both ways, from the ships and then back. You got machine gunfire when you get in close enough. You got some cannon fire from the island shooting, and a lot of them don't make it to the beach. That's just a simple story. They go in to the water and nobody can stop for them, you got to keep going, you got to keep moving. And I don't know what the percentages run, but on those small islands, I'd say at least ten percent don't even make it to the beach because you got a reef there. And on Saipan, we didn't have an amphib to go in, so we had to have an LCVP, which you can't get over the reef. So you wade in from the reef and water anywhere from shoulder deep to knee deep, and them firing at you.

JW: And I assume you got a packful of stuff on?

RH: Yeah, you got your medical stuff. Well, because we were corpsmen, we didn't have a rifle, we had a .45 on our hip. And course, you had 6 the pack with clothes and whatever change you needed; but most of what we carried was medical and it had a Red Cross on it. We had our badges, our morphine, anything to stop bleeding, the needles. And we had compress bandages mostly to stop the wound with those, the bleeding was the first thing you tried to do. And if it required sewing up, I wasn't capable of doing that, but the head corpsman was and the doctor. But what bothered me as much or more than anything was here this young boy, eighteen-years-old or nineteen-years-old, and he's there and he's bleeding out of the mouth, foaming out of the mouth and where the shrapnel's hit him. And the doctor says, "Leave him and go to somebody you can save." Well, this boy lays there for hours, dying, that hurts you.

JW: Right, right.

RH: They just saved the ones they think they got the best chance of saving.

JW: Right. Well, you know, I've heard of them doing that today in plane crashes and things like that. And you know, the theory is don't waste your time on someone that's a goner when you can go to the next person and maybe save their lives.

RH: Yeah, that's the way the doctors looked at it.

JW: It makes good sense, but I'm sure that's awful hard to do.

RH: Yeah, yeah, it is. Course that's what I was, I was eighteen and that's mostly what most of them were eighteen, nineteen-year-olds.

JW: Right, right. Well, after you went to corps school in Hawaii, where did you go from there? Did they put you on a ship?

RH: Yeah, they put us aboard an APA, that's a transport with these boats on it. And we weren't ship's company, but we rode and we made some practice runs on Maui, just practicing, and it was a whole lot maybe like Saipan.

JW: Did this ship have a name?

RH: Yeah, USS CUSTER, APA-40. But like I said, we weren't ship's company, we just rode with them and trained with them.

JW: Right. So that was like a temporary training type, more or less?

RH: Yeah, it was. And the Marines, see, they'd load up and go with us, just like they did when we went to the actual battle. And we went through the same process, landing on Maui there, as we did on Saipan. And they had the planes bombing and amount of fire going on. They wasn't shelling the island, of course, they had an island there that was uninhabited that they used. The planes would bomb it and the ships would shell it, but you went right by that. It kindly gave you a perception of what--

JW: Of what you were fixing to get in to?

RH: Yeah, right.

JW: Well, what happened next? 7

RH: Well, next, they loaded us all up. Course they don't tell you where you're going, but they load us up with a unit of Marines. Saipan was the 2nd and 4th Marine Division, and there's a lot of transports in this group. And some of the old battle wagons and some of the old World War I, they more or less traveled with us. And they tell you about the third or fourth day where you're going, and they told us we were going to land on Saipan. And they drag out these deals of the island, made from these pictures, and the hills and everything. What do you call that when they've got it? They got it just like the island--

JW: Topographical map, I think?

RH: Yeah. They'd show you where you're going to land and how they was going to do it and whatever a unit's supposed to do and so forth and so on.

JW: Were you still on board the CUSTER?

RH: Still on board the CUSTER, yeah. Takes several days to go from Hawaii to the Marianas, takes several days, I don't remember. Guessing, I'd say ten or twelve days. But most of the time we was on there, the Marines all had a certain plan, they all had plans, each unit done what they was going to do, and you are told what you're going to do. Everybody's got a place and you got a certain hour for this and that and the other. But then once the battle starts and once you get to the beach, if you get there, there is nobody where they're supposed to be. And you may be on the wrong beach and you might be on the right beach, but that's just the way it is, and so you got to adjust to all that. I don't care how good your laid plans are, when you get there, that's the way it's going to be. And I found that to be true on every one of them, and that was my first one.

JW: What happened as you got to Saipan? Was the battle already going on?

RH: Yeah, they was already landing. The Japanese were trying, they were trying to ship some of their marines from Tinian Island to Saipan. And one of our destroyers or one of the cruisers, I think it was the INDIANAPOLIS, they just blew it to smithereens, and they were just floating around there in the water on a piece of board or whatever, the ones that was still alive. So what they'd do, you line up on how you're going to unload and when it comes your time, you climb down the side of this ship on a cargo net. You got to watch the bounce of the deal, and you just let down and jump into the LCVP

that you're going to go to the beach on. And once all the personnel gets loaded, they drive out a little ways toward the island and they start circling, like this, in a round circle. And all this circle here is a wave, one wave. So then they give the signal to you when it's time for you to start and go. That's the way, you just head for the beach. Now, there's so much fire going on or so many explosions, there's so much dust in the air, there's so much smoke in the air, you can barely see the island at times. And you get there, you get 8 close, and when you hit that reef, then you can more or less see the beach. But by the time that we got there, it was dark, almost dark, which probably helped us. But when we hit the beach, wading, why, there were dead bodies. You waded through dead bodies, but you had to proceed on. And when we got to the beach, there just wasn't much room. They hadn't gotten far enough in, the first wave hadn't got far enough in, took us awhile to get out of the water. And that right there on that sand was where I spent that first night. And all the while, we're being shelled from Tinian, which they had some people that seemed to know, said they were French guns that they had captured in Indonesia or somewhere and they made a weird sound. And course they was landing here and there, just kind of the luck of the draw, I guess, where they land. There was a Marine wasn't too far from me, and we talked a little bit. And he said, "Well, I tell you," we was talking about them, the way they sound, and he said, "Well, you don't have to worry about them." He said, "What you got to worry about is the one that you won't hear." He said, "That's the one that's going to get you." So you know, I guess the ones that was going over us is when you hear the sound of it. But it being dark, that saved us more or less from being strafed right then. But during the night while we was there, I better get to that first. The Japs put on a bonzai charge. We was put in this gap where it was supposed to been, they hadn't sealed the gap off and that's what our unit went in to; but it took us awhile to get organized and that's why it took us so long. We was, I guess it'd be south of where we was supposed to be, so we had to go up the beach to get to where we was supposed to been. But anyway it was dark, but once daylight came, we started moving up to look for the doctor and the head corpsman. And course, there was wounded laying everywhere.

JW: That's what I would say. That night while you were more or less stuck there, were you attending to injured?

RH: Yeah, at times. Actually, most of the fire was going ahead of us because they had a spotter up there somewhere and he was more or less telling them where the front was and so forth. And they had a sniper or two around. But when we came across somebody we could help, we did. And then after we moved out that next morning, we got up over those beaches that are kind of steep like that and then they kind of level out. There was a railroad track there and a big sugar mill. Course it had a thousand holes blown in it, and that's where the Marines had made their stand for the night. There was a ditch on each side of that narrow grade railroad. And there was bodies of Japanese six and seven deep, stacked on top of one another, just slaughtered. And course, we had several on our side, too; but I never forget that, how many. You know, they were just fanatical, I guess you'd call it. They'd just make a charge, knowing they was going to get it; but I guess if they'd have broke through, they'd have got us. But they didn't make it because those BARs and those machine guns and the rifle fire, they just did a magnificent job of keeping from pushing us back off the beach again. Once it became daylight, then we started 9 having to put up with being strafed.

JW: And this is Japanese planes?

RH: Yeah, Japanese planes. They come right up a beach spraying us, strafing, and you wouldn't think that that would make as much jarring and loud noise as it does. I mean you could hear them coming, so we got out of the way of it by moving further inland a little ways. But that pilot, he was so low, I could see him, I could see his face, I could see his coat. He seen us, too. But I guess when he run out of lead in his deal, he just peeled off like this, still staying low to the ground and went on. But he hit what I think was an ammunition dump, where we'd stacked some ammunition. And when that blew up, that blew our helmets off, hurt our ears. It messed some of them up that was closer to it. I was far enough from it, it didn't; but it damaged a lot of Marines, probably killed some.

JW: Yeah. A blast powerful enough to knock your helmet off from a distance.

RH: Yeah, I'd say as far as from here to across ten acres maybe, six hundred sixty feet.

JW: Do you remember what month and year this is going on?

RH: Yeah. It was June of '44, same month that they invaded D-Day in Europe, only it was the 15th instead of the 6th.

JW: So you just continued advancing towards the interior of the island?

RH: Yeah, yeah. The Marines moved very rapidly as they can, they might skip somebody; but then the Army moved in and they got in between and they moved more slowly. They cleaned up as they went along, where the Marines didn't. But our job got to be getting to the line and getting the wounded back to the beach so they could be loaded. And by that time, there was three hospital ships laying off the beach there and we had to get them back to there. And we had stretchers to carry them on, but it kept getting further and further away. And so they had Jeep carriers, but we didn't have one. And so the beachmaster, the doctor told them, said, "We're having to carry these a long ways, we could sure use one." So they was unloading three Jeep carriers, Marine Jeep carriers. They can haul three wounded. So he rolled one of them to the side and told us to use it. So they put another boy and me on that one, and he was driving. So then we'd go up to the front and pick them up. And they had a little aid station. See, there was a Navy corpsman, I believe it was every platoon, I believe it is, but I'm not positive about that. But we knew where to go to get them and then we'd bring them back to the beach. So on the second day, they put me to doing something else, I don't

remember now what it was. But this other boy, he stayed with it and they sent another corpsman with him. So it wasn't thirty minutes or an hour until he was back and a Marine Colonel had him arrested, and what the charge was was stealing a Jeep. So the beachmaster and 10 the doctor talked to the Colonel about the circumstances, we had to have one or needed one real bad and not to charge him with stealing a Jeep. So they did, he just took the Jeep and went on finally, but that'd been a pretty serious charge, stealing a Jeep.

JW: Well, I'm sure it was a lot better than carrying those men on stretchers back, but also I imagine that Jeep carrier made a pretty good target.

RH: Yeah, but you can move faster and I never would drive in a straight line; but course, you had to follow where you could go. But yeah, we got shot at, we sure did. There was a sniper in that smokestack. They didn't know where he was at the time, but they got to thinking that there was one there. And when this other boy and I was carrying, this other corpsman and I was carrying a stretcher, we went down through there. Wasn't too far, we heard this k-i-i-i, making a funny noise, like c-h-i-i, like that. At first we didn't know what it was, but it was him, he shot at us and that bullet hit the ground that made that, but the bullet went between us. When they were out there, they got this rifle pointed in a small hole and they don't vary like that. In other words, you get in their sight, they pull the trigger.

JW: Right. They're waiting on you to get in their sight?

RH: Right, right, right. And it was just lucky that he missed me. I was in front and by the time he got his next shot, I guess, we heard it twice, but it didn't hit either one of us. That was luck, too.

JW: Yeah, yeah. Wasn't your day.

RH: Yeah, it was not. You sometimes wonder about that, why was it him instead of me.

JW: Can't come up with an answer to that.

JW: No, you sure can't. I guess you could call it luck, depending on how you look at it. But at the time, I didn't belong to a church; but I believe, I've always believed in a God and all that. I'd went to church some. Everybody handles that in a different way. And the main thing that I prayed to myself for was, course, nobody wants to die, but what I prayed for was give me the courage to do what I've

got to do without showing fear, and I pretty well made it that way. But back in those days, I know now everybody is afraid as I am. Some people handles it different than others, some people handles it better and some people can't handle it at all. And when that happens, they break down right there on the field. And so we were there ten days doing that. And I remember one load we got, there was a native woman was one of them and that woman, we picked her up and put her on the deal, the stretcher, she had a hole blowed in her side here, I could have put my fist in it. There wasn't a drop of blood coming out of it. She had her eyes open, looking right at us, not one groan, not one complaint. And I've often wondered, she didn't act like she was in shock, her eyes was moving, she'd look at you and then look off at something else. But we took her right on with the ones that-- I guess they shipped her out and 11 treated her and I don't know whether she made it or not.

JW: No way of knowing.

RH: No. But course after about day five, things got better for us, because the only thing that we had to worry about was getting up, when we got up close to the front, then we had to worry; but you know, at least there on the beach and everything, got a lot better. We got abandoned there for one night or couple of nights and a day. I guess that was about D+3 that morning, when daylight came, there wasn't no ships out there. All the transports were gone and all of our cruisers and all of our firepower was gone. Somebody thought, well, what in the world is going on here. So we walked down to the beachmaster and he said, "Well, the Japanese Navy is coming from the Philippines." In other words, they're after us. And so our Navy, our battleships and our men-of-war and all that help went out to meet them, our aircraft carriers and all that had went out to meet them and so that's why they wasn't there. And they won that battle. If they hadn't, we'd probably been prisoners within that week. But another thing I'd like to mention during that time, was about D+3, I guess, somewhere in that area, we'd made us a little home there in a shell hole. We kind of rounded it off and had kind of showered a little every night, but that's before they spotted or they finally figured out that that sniper was in that smokestack.

JW: At the sugar mill, you said?

RH: Yeah, at the sugar mill. It had a thousand holes in it, but there was one stack still standing. And so the beachmaster, he told the radio signalman, they had a command ship out there, send a dive bomber over here to see if he can knock that down. And it wasn't just a little bit and here come this dive bomber. And they're a pretty good sized plane, Avengers, got three, a pilot, a radio signalmen or radioman and a tailgunner. But anyway, he made this circle there and then he's, like that (indicating), he dropped that bomb and that thing looked like it went right down that smokestack. Marines went over there, and sure enough, that sniper was in there, and it might have been the one I seen that night. But anyway, years later, when George Bush was running for President, George Herbert Bush, I read this article and it mentioned that he was the pilot of that plane that knocked that down.

JW: Oh, really.

RH: That kind of shows you how small the world is sometimes.

JW: Right, right.

RH: But it's kind of a funny-- Well, in that same hole I was telling you about, one night there, they dropped these flares every so often that keeps things lit up. But they go out, we called them flares, they called them star shells or something. But anyway, they would float down and they'd light up everything, you can see everything. Well, one of them, I seen a Jap soldier and he stopped like this (indicating) and he was about as far as from here to the road out here from us. 12 But the doctor was sitting there and I nudged him like that and I pointed and I think he saw him. But about that time, the flare went out. But he told me, he said, "Shoot him." All right. When they dropped the next one, he was gone, he wasn't there. And the doctor, the next morning, he kindly got on my tail, said I ought to took a shot at him because I saw him first. But we had orders not to do that, because back there, you might kill one of our own. The Marines is supposed to take care of that, we weren't supposed to, but he kindly thought I ought to. But heck, you see, we was setting in a circle, like this, in that hole, was six of us, seven of us in there. I wasn't trained for that anyway.

JW: Well, that was a lucky Japanese soldier, at least right then it was.

RH: Yeah, yeah. There was a boy, if he'd been sitting where I was, I don't doubt that he wouldn't have took a shot at him because he'd been a hunter and this, that and the other, where I never had. So he might have got him. He probably went on and got somebody else, but-- and this was a direct threat to you, we wasn't supposed to know anything like that. But I've thought about it since, I figure that he probably was the one that was up in that smokestack and he was going somewhere to get him some water is what I think, but I don't know if that's true. The sugar mill, they had an office there and everything, and part of that building was still standing and it had a well there. I wouldn't want to drink none of the water, but it had a well there. But anyway, we stayed there on Saipan ten days. And on the tenth day, they told us that we was gonna have to go. Well, we had a few souvenirs. You know, all the Jap officers, they had a sabre. One of the corpsmen, he had a sabre, and I had an officer's handgun. It looked similar to a German Kruger, but it wasn't, it wasn't near the pistol. But anyway, I had that and I had those things I was showing her. And they told us we had to leave, there was a concrete ramp dock that went plumb out to the reef from that sugar mill. So said we had to leave by that, they'll pick you up at the end of the deal, so they took every one of our souvenirs away from us.

JW: Oh, really?

RH: They let me keep what I kept and they let others keep a few things. But anything that was worth anything, the Marine MPs was out there, they kept them, they got them and kept them because you wasn't really supposed to do that. You wasn't supposed to get souvenirs, was kind of against the rules, it was an order not to do it. But now this is not a very good thing to tell, but one of our corpsmen, all those dead Japs there, course, they get to stinking pretty bad there pretty quick, had a mouth full of gold teeth. We had a big old beach-party knife, about that long (indicating), had a long blade on it. He would pry them gold teeth out of those mouths and when he got the chance, he'd go down there at that sand on the beach and all, and he'd work all that old bone out of that, and when he left, he had a sack full of gold. But I couldn't stomach anything like that, but they did it. 13

JW: Yeah, yeah.

RH: And I've seen it mentioned on the History Channel, that some of the Marines did that. But a dead body, I wouldn't have done it for a thousand dollars.

JW: I'm sure that bag of gold was worth a pretty penny at the time; but boy, what it took to get it.

RH: Yeah, yeah. And he got his way, I don't know where he had it, probably in his pocket or something, when we checked out of there; but I don't know, he got it back anyway. Seemed like there was something else I was gonna tell there and I can't think of what it was. Well, slipped my mind now. But anyway, we went back to the ship. And I'd been noticing this friend of mine, I'd made a liberty or two with him, but he never did have a whole lot to say. He was friendly, but he was just like he had something on his mind. So when we got back to the ship, we headed out. And after, oh, about the second or third day, they said, "Well, we're going to the Marshalls and we're gonna pick up some more Marines from the 3rd Marine Division and we're going to Guam and do the same thing over." Well, they boarded us with ship's crew, wherever they could find a bunk, and he was with the motor macs on the rear of the ship, and he went down there and he was in the top bunk. And he got up in that top bunk when there wasn't nobody in there. And he slit his wrists open, shhhh, like that (indicating). And a motor mac went down there, I don't know how long he'd been bleeding like that, long enough it was bad. But anyway, he saw a big pool of blood and he looked up and saw that arm hanging down. And so he run and got some help and they carried him to the sick bay; but far as I know, he bled to death. That got to me, that's hard to take. I thought, well, like I said before, nobody wants to die, but I'd take my chances on a beach that time and I guess he just didn't want to face it no more. I don't know what his idea was, but that's what he did and course he didn't face it no more.

JW: Well, there's some, you know, there's some people that's just not able to handle such a situation. From the beginning of time until the end of time, there will be--

RH: I just thank God that I took it as good as I did. And you know, on the next one, I didn't even dread it at all, I didn't. I knew what to expect, knew what it was gonna be like and I didn't dread it. And when we went in on Guam, it wasn't near as hard, wasn't near as bad. At least where we was at, it wasn't near as bad as what we had there on Saipan. And I often thought about that, my buddy, you know, if he hadn't done what he done, he'd be alive today more than likely. ** We stayed four or five days on Guam (according to my service record) and I can't remember one thing about it, except going in and coming out. **

JW: Maybe it would have got easier for him, maybe it wouldn't have. 14

RH: Yeah, that's true.

JW: No way of knowing.

RH: Everybody, I guess they get a breaking point and they do different things. But I tell you now, you talking about courage. You get on that landing craft and you head toward the beach in something like that, and you know what's likely to happen to you and probably will. It takes courage now, it takes courage. They can say whatever they want, but a man has to have a certain amount of courage and fortitude and determination to stay with something like that.

JW: I agree.

RH: Or just lay down and cry, I guess you could do, but that's not gonna help you. I never seen nobody do that, but I've heard of them doing different things, but I didn't see anything like that. Most of them take it a lot better than I thought humanly possible. But once you get in a situation like that, to me, you sort of change. You know the situation you're in, you know you got to do it.

JW: You don't have a choice.

RH: And you don't have a choice, so you just kind of go into a different mode. And I think even until this day, that all them after that never bothered me. I won't say it didn't bother me, but I didn't look forward to them, but I didn't dread it and I didn't--

JW: The first time you do anything, it's different from all the rest, especially the first time you go in and risk your life and see people dying right and left. The hardest thing, I guess the hardest thing a human being ever has to do.

RH: Yeah. That first night or two was the longest night I ever spent in my life, and most horrible one. And I couldn't do it, like I said, I was only eighteen years old and it will change your life forever.

JW: I imagine.

RH: You'll never be the same again, I guarantee you, I never was. And that's about all I can say about the Guam invasion. I can't think of anything I left out or I know I left out some things. Oh, yeah, the one thing we had to do, the worst job we got into, in my estimation, I mentioned the dead bodies that was between the reef and the beach. Well, we'd pick them up and course bring them to the beach. But the first one we went out there to get, took a stretcher with us, just three corpsmen. And so two of us had the stretcher, and the other corpsman, he was turning the bodies over, but he reached over and got ahold of this arm to pull him over and the flesh come off, flesh just peeled off the arm and hand. ** We held the stretcher under the water and brought it up under him. **

JW: Been in the water for a day?

RH: Yeah. Over there in the Tropics, a body decays real fast, real fast. And that first one, I seen his face and I thought, man, I'm telling you, I just never looked at another one. I just wouldn't look 15 at them anymore. We moved them off and got them back and they got buried.

JW: Did you bury them there on the island?

RH: Yeah, some of them were buried there on the island. Most of them that we did that were buried there. They started a cemetery pretty quick. And then I think in the '50s or '60s, they went over there and gathered them all up and brought them to the U.S.A. You know, we had to take those dog tags, and I wasn't in burial detail, but they had a detail for that.

JW: Right.

RH: But they'd stick that rifle in the ground, and they'd take them dog tags and they'd leave the one on the chain where the body was, and they'd take one and it was turned in to the M.D. and then he turned it in when he got back to the ship.

JW: Well, I don't guess you got a break after Guam? It was something else?

RH: Yeah. We went to the Philippines, and we got transferred to MacArthur's command. And we shipped out to New Guinea, and there we picked up and landed on Leyte with the Army.

JW: Is this on a different ship?

RH: Yeah. And then for us, it was much easier because the Japanese didn't fight on the beach on those large, larger islands and all that. So it was a picnic compared to what we'd been doing.

JW: Saipan and Guam?

RH: Yeah. And we made three there in the Philippines, and what we had there was sea battles. When we was going up from Leyte to invade the Upper Northern Luzon, because they hit the upper part of Luzon first, we was coming into the South China Sea, the whole convoy was. And that was the first kamikaze attack that was performed in the war. And they sunk escort carriers, midsized escort carrier, they sunk a cruiser. They sunk several, that's what they sunk where we could see. And they hit the cruiser that was next to us and damaged it real bad, it didn't have its radar, it had it knocked off and part of its bridge, it killed several on it. But that is not, to me, it's not as bad as having to land on a beach. To me, that's the nth degree. I mean that is much worse. Course you're all right on a ship until you get hit, then's when you're in trouble. Just happy that I wasn't on a ship that got hit. But then we went on to Okinawa where we ended up, and it was bad. There again, they let them land there without too much trouble. But then the kamikazes was after us and they hit some transports there. But we was one of the fortunate ones that didn't get hit, so we come on and we left Okinawa, we came back to Pearl Harbor. And the beach-party was set off and we stayed in Pearl Harbor until the end of the war. They was getting ready to go back to Japan and invade Japan. They was going to put us or did put us on the USS JOSEPH T. DICKMAN, 16 converting it over to a hospital ship. It had been a peacetime liner, so I would have had better duty if we'd went and invaded Japan, which they would have done in October, than the kind of thing I'd been going through. But I would have had to went back to that invasion, but thank God I didn't. They was figuring on around five hundred thousand casualties on Japan.

JW: So you remember the day, you remember anything about the day they bombed Nagasaki?

RH: Yeah, yeah. We were setting there in Pearl Harbor and they was putting elevators on this USS JOSEPH T. DICKMAN, like I said, been a cruise ship or a liner, and they was putting the elevators on and they about had everything finished, ready for us to go. We was setting there, and, oh, I don't know, I was sleeping out on deck and I heard this band coming and playing. Boy, here come this band in the middle of the night, boys of Navy Band from one of the bases there. And somebody hollered, "Well, what's going on?""Well, the Japanese have surrendered, we dropped the atomic bomb and they surrendered." Well, they stopped work immediately the next day, they never did another bit of work on that, and we headed for the States. So we got in to San Francisco. Then that was a false alarm, that first one, but we was already on our way.

JW: That was after the first bomb?

RH: Yeah.

JW: And not the second bomb?

RH: I guess, it must have been; but anyway, we got almost to San Francisco. Well then, they said, well, this is the real thing, the Japs have surrendered.

JW: What ship were you on, do you remember?

RH: Yeah, the USS JOSEPH T. DICKMAN.

JW: Oh, you were on that ship they were converting?

RH: Yeah, same ship. And so it was a pretty large transport. And so next day, we got in to San Francisco and they tore Market Street up celebrating. So we didn't get our liberty that first night, but the next night we did and that's when that picture was made there that I brought with me. And so we stayed around, oh, about a week and I went, I had a first cousin lived over in Vallejo, so I went over there and seen them. Got back to the ship and they said, "Well, we're going back out." "Well, where are we going?" "Well, we're going to Manila." So we headed out for Manila and we got over at Manila

and they was bringing these that lot of them had been prisoners-of-war. So we got fifty of the Bataan Death Marchers, ones that had survived. And that was our job, the corpsmen, to take care of them. Course they brought a lot of regular troops back, too; but our job was to take care of these. So I heard the stories of every one of them, how they were treated, how they were beaten; and if they fell down, they'd 17 bayonette them or shoot them, how cruel they were to them. I heard every one of their stories. Every one of them had been starved more or less, but they were the ones that were maybe better off than some of the others. They had to fly a lot of them, but that fifty, I guess they was a younger group when they were captured. But anyway, they had worked them in coal mines and they fed them seaweed soup, and they all had to be given vitamin shots and we had to bring them back.

JW: I guess you had to be careful. You know, a big steak dinner or lobster might have killed them.

RH: Yeah. They was on a strict diet, and we brought in, I don't remember now, but we would bring in the food and feed them. They got certain things. I don't remember what the certain things was, but we made the trip back with them into San Francisco. And they took them up to that big hospital there, around where the Golden Gate Bridge is, I forget the name of that place. But anyway, he was speaking about the way the Japanese treated them, and I've seen this happen. The Japanese, in combat, if they captured you, they didn't respect you, they'd kill you one way or the other. And so the Marines fought that like they fought, they didn't take any prisoners, either, unless it was one they thought they might get some information out of about what was going on. But most usually, if a group come out running, they were shot down and they done them the same way that they done the Marines. And nowadays, in the war they're fighting now, they're liable to charge you. I mean that's the way it looks to me, different kind of war, and I've often thought about that. But we got them back to the States, and so I finally got a leave home, that's the first one I'd had.

JW: This is September, October, 1945?

RH: Yeah, it was October. No, about the first of November of '45. I'd been gone almost three years and I got to come home. My parents lived out here then.

JW: Fort Smith?

RH: Yeah. And in Muldrow, they bought a farm for what they got for their farm down there, basically what it amounted to, and I still live on part of it. And I can't think of anything else.

JW: Well, you came home here on leave, but you weren't discharged?

RH: No, I had a thirty day leave. And I don't know, travel time, whatever that was, three days or so forth, but I was forwarded back to Oklahoma City, recruiting office in Oklahoma City, and that was in December. And so my brother and Dad, Dad had a pickup, they just drove me out there and had my sea bags and everything in the back of the pickup. And they drove me back out there and dropped me off in front of that, we said good-bye. So checked in with them and they said, "Well, we're gonna put you on a train in the morning," said "ya'll stay here in a hotel tonight." So me and another kid, we went to a movie that night; and next day, they put us on a train headed west and we ended up back in San Diego, Camp Elliot, which they was using for a receiving ship at that time. 18 And I'd been there one night and they called my name on the loud speaker, "Report to the personnel office." That's the only time in my whole Navy career they ever asked me if I wanted to do something, instead of telling me. So I went down there at the personnel office and they said, "We've got three LCIs down here in the harbor and they're going around through the Panama Canal to Staten Island, New York, to be decommissioned. It calls for a 2nd Class Pharmacist Mate and there's not one on base here, and you're the one, you're the 3rd Class with the most experience. Would you like to make that trip?" Well, I had never been through Panama Canal or I'd never been to the East Coast, and I had a waiting time because I wasn't married, I would've been in, so I said, "Well, why not. Yeah, I'll do it." So they went, got with me and helped gather my stuff up and I was down there within thirty minutes, throwing my stuff on the deck of the LCI-645R (R standing for rocket launcher) and away we went, out of San Diego Harbor. And I enjoyed it. I was a Senior Medical Officer, 3rd Class Pharmacist Mate. Boy, they all respect you, Marines respect you. But anyway, got about halfway down the Mexican Coast and this one we were on, those are powered, they're a hundred and fifty-six foot long and twenty-two foot wide and they're powered by four truck diesel motors. You run portside, starboard side, portside, starboard side, unless you get in an emergency, then they run all four. But anyway, they had every motor down but one, they was running on one motor. So they wired the Mexican Government if they could come into Acapulco Harbor there until they could at least get one motor overhauled by getting the other mechanics from the other two LCIs to help out where they could have at least two motors to run off while they repaired the others. So they give us permission to come in, and it was like paradise then. Lot of vacation people from Europe and different people and a speed boat come out with a pretty girl on it to greet us and all that stuff.

JW: Did they let you off? Did you get to get off the ship?

RH: Oh, yeah. They give us, we just stayed one day and two nights until they got that one motor back together and running. But anyway, that one day, they give port and starboard liberty to everybody but the motor macs and they had to work. So naturally, I took the morning one, and get to messing around with the girls and all that stuff, get to drinking a little, too, and get to feeling pretty good. And so me and my buddy, we didn't report back at noon. And there about five o'clock that evening, here come the coxswain off the ship that we was on, hollering our names out, "We're pulling out, we're pulling out." And we was up in a motel room, hotel, wasn't no motels back in those days. "What's the matter?" "They're gonna pull out at six o'clock." And it was about fifteen until six then. If you're

not there, they're going to run off and leave us. And man, we got with it, we got down there because the Captain, he was a Lieutenant JG, there was only three officers on the ship at that time. But anyway, he didn't say nothing about it then. But the next day he called me in his office or his deal there, living quarters. He 19 said, "I'm gonna give you a Captain's mass. You stayed over your liberty." I said, "I know it, I'm guilty, I sure did." He said, "Well, when we get to the Panama Canal, you're restricted for a week." And I said, "Okay. I deserve it." That's what I told him, I said I deserved it, he was a nice guy. And so we got down there, I missed out, we stayed there two weeks. But on the way down there, I had one of the crewmen come to me, and everybody had been home on leave. He said, "I believe I've got a venereal disease." I said, "What makes you think that? Were you exposed like that?" He said, "Well, no, only to my wife." I said, "Well, what makes you think that?" I asked him, "You got a discharge or are you sore or anything?" He said, "No, I just feel like I do." I said, "Well, when we get down to Cocasola, they got a dispensary there, a big one. And you can go over there and test you, I haven't got no way of testing you." And I told the Captain about it. He said, "Well, take him over there." So I took him over there, and sure enough, he had syphilis and so they wanted to keep him down there. I went back and I told the Captain, I said, "Captain, they're wanting to keep the boy there and we're headed for Staten Island, New York and there's a naval hospital right across the bay there, Brooklyn Naval Yard, Brooklyn Naval Hospital in Brooklyn." And I said, "The boy is not wanting to stay, of course." And so he went back over there with me and he said, "If you'll let him go, I promise you, he'll go to the Naval Hospital just as quick as we get there." So told me to give him some penicillin shots, which I did. And we got up there, so I took him over there, but I had to fill out some forms. One went to the Navy Department, one went to the State Health Department of Missouri and one went to the local Health Department in Missouri. Okay. There I was faced with filling those things out and asking him questions and so forth. And it being his wife, see, and what kind of condition he was in, and he begged me, says to not mail the one, the local one. I said, "Well, what they're gonna do is they're gonna go get her, they're gonna pick her up and they're gonna treat her and she needs to be treated, she needs to get rid of that." But he still begged me not to do it. I said, "Well, I more or less got to do it, but I tell you what, I'm not doing you any favors by doing this," but I said, "if you'll promise me that you'll get your wife to treatment, or I don't know what your situation is, but if you stay with her, get her treated because that's what she's got." And he promised me he would. So I didn't mail that letter, I tore it up and threw it away, but I hope he come out all right on it. But when you're in a situation like that, what do you do, you know?

JW: Well, I was setting here thinking that the story was gonna end he went home and killed her, so things turned out better than they appeared to.

RH: Yeah, yeah. I could have went home with him, I might have found that out; but that truly happened, though, that's a true story.

JW: Humans are humans. 20

RH: What floored me so much was that he didn't lie about it. Why didn't he say he got it off a whorehouse or something. That's what kind of got me on it. Creating a situation there that--

JW: Well, he didn't think that far.

RH: That's right, he was just an old country boy, young country boy from the foothills of Missouri up there, so he didn't have anybody else to go to. But when we got to Staten Island, I took him to the Naval Hospital. I don't know, it was several days there and they started unhooking the steam and stuff. They transferred us all over to the Brooklyn Naval Yard, and they fixed out our delayed travel papers and everything over there. And this lady told us, said, "If you'll catch this subway here, you'll cross the river to New Jersey." I forget what the name of the town in New Jersey with the big airport, and all these Army planes was coming in from Europe that had been paratroop planes. Said you can catch a free ride on one of those, they're going plumb to California, some of them. And so we went and we did that. And heck, that evening, we caught a flight that was going all the way to Los Angeles and was gonna make a stop in Memphis, Fort Worth and somewhere in Arizona and then on to somewhere out in Los Angeles. So we caught the flight, and that next morning, we landed in Memphis, it was a DC-3. And that's where I got off because I figured, well, if I went on to Fort Worth, gonna take time to fly down there and I'm about as close to here in Memphis as I would be at Fort Worth, so I got off at Memphis and hitched me a ride on home. I got home that evening.

JW: You hitchhiked from Memphis?

RH: Yeah. They'd pick the servicemen up then pretty well. Got salesman going from Memphis to Little Rock in one ride, and got out there in North Little Rock and got on the highway going on to Fort Smith. I think there were a couple of different ones on that one, but I ended up in Fort Smith, oh, it was before dark.

JW: Anybody know you were coming that day?

RH: They didn't know exactly when I was gonna get there. So I caught a bus out down here at the bus station in Fort Smith and got off the bus there, and they let me off in front of the house. I bought a ticket to Redland Crossing, and that way I didn't have to walk out of Muldrow on out there. And my mother come to the door, she had aged a lot, I thought, in that three years, you know, when you hadn't seen somebody in three years. And that's kind of the end of the story.

JW: Well, you came home with all your fingers and toes and eyes and ears?

RH: Yeah. My hearing wasn't back like it should have been, but they operated on both my ears there in Hawaii.

JW: And you weren't married?

RH: No, no, I hadn't married. That's why I had to stay. Yeah, I think the Navy gave you ten points for being married, and I didn't have them ten points. I could have stayed right there in San Diego, at 21 Camp Elliot, the rest of my term if I had wanted to. And I had a girlfriend up in Los Angeles, up there in Garden Grove. I don't know why I didn't, but I never had been to the Panama Canal and the East Coast, and I guess I just wanted to see some more of the world.

JW: Canal's a pretty amazing place, isn't it. The Canal Zone is a pretty amazing place.

RH: Yeah, it is. In those days, everything was fixed like it's supposed to be. But there in that town, that Cocosola, I think was the name of it, we had a few liberties up there after my restriction was over. And they'd throw their garbage out of the upstairs window, the alleys were concreted and they'd just throw it, let it rot there. Different type people than what we have here. Then we was coming across the Gulf of Mexico there, it was New Year's Day. And I went up on the bridge of this LCI I was on, and Oklahoma State and St. Mary's of California was playing in the Sugar Bowl. And Oklahoma State had Bob Fenimore and St. Mary's of California had Herman Weidimeyer, and played tailback, single wingback in those days, just a battle between the triple-threaters. And so we listened to that game on the ship's radio.

JW: Well, when you got back to Muldrow, I assume you took a week or two or a month or two or something and just relaxed?

RH: Yeah. I had, let's see, that'd be about three or four weeks at home. And course, my parents naturally were glad to see me. But my dad said, "You can drive the pickup anytime, if you want to go out some." And so I did, went to dances, this, that and the other. Messed around those days and visit some kinfolks, I enjoyed it, having my birthday while I was home, my 20th birthday. But then I had to go back, like I said, to Oklahoma City and catch the train to send me back to the-- No, wait, I'm getting this mixed up. You talking about my leave home?

JW: I was talking about after the war, but you're talking about when you had that thirty day leave?

RH: Yeah, I'm talking about that, yeah. And then I had to go back to the West Coast, but when I come in, I had seventeen days delayed orders from New York to Norman. That's where they discharged me at was Norman. And course, then I caught a bus when it come to the day to report. Course, making that flight, I had quite a few days at home before I even had to go out to Norman because I flew it all in one night and one day.

JW: So you went to Norman and --

RH: That's where I was discharged.

JW: Got discharged?

RH: Yeah.

JW: And came back. What'd you do after you got back home?

RH: You know, I didn't do much of anything for awhile. They paid us that 52/20 they pay you until you could find a job, 52 weeks, 20 22 dollars a week. So I signed up for that, but I never did draw all of it. I went back to school, and then when I got through with that, I went out to Oklahoma A&M Tech for a year and a half.

JW: Where is that?

RH: That was at Okmulgee, it was in an old U.S. Army hospital they'd built there for wartime, so they just turned the buildings over to the school. But yeah, I caught the bus back to Norman and that's where I was discharged down in Norman. And they tried to get me to sign over naturally.

JW: Right.

RH: And they gave me the choice, we'll give you next highest rank, grade, and your choice of theater, overseas, and I didn't want to go back overseas, you know. I said, "Well, no, I don't think I'm interested. I've had about all the Navy that I want." Well, you've got ninety days, you got three

months. You make up your mind in three months that you don't want to do this, why, we'll accept it if you just don't want to do it. But we'll give you thirty days, and if you change your mind, we'll come back and you'll get the next highest rate and if you want to go to Europe, if you want to go to Mediterranean, just about anywhere, Australia or wherever." But I just never did do it. I didn't give it too much thought, really.

JW: Enough is enough?

RH: Enough is enough, yeah.

JW: So after school at Okmulgee, where'd you go, what did you do?

RH: Well, I got a job at Texas Oil Company and I worked for them for seven or eight years.

JW: Over in Oklahoma?

RH: Yeah, right here out of Fort Smith.

JW: Oh, here? I see.

RH: Yeah. And then after that, I had-- No, I'm getting this backwards. I got a job with Swift and Company, and I worked for them for four, five, six years, until 1951 or 2, then I went to work for the Texas Company, I worked for them about eight years. And then I went to work for Acme Brick, driving a truck. And for the first eleven years, I drove their truck. And they needed some more trucks so they offered a few of us, if we wanted to buy our own truck, we could buy our own truck and haul for the freight rate. And brick's got a pretty good freight rate on it because it's heavy and don't take much room. And so I bought a truck and I did that for thirty years. And I didn't get rich, but I made pretty good money doing it.

JW: Well, somewhere in there, you got married?

RH: Yeah. I got married 1951, and I lived out there and eventually got quite a few cattle and had me a pretty good herd built up there. All the time, I was hauling brick and all that, so I had a double

income. That, and then my wife worked some at the factory here, did 23 office work until she retired. She finally had a nervous breakdown and never did go back to work anymore.

JW: Were you in any danger of getting called back up for the Korean War?

RH: No, they tried to get me to come back; but when I got out, I told them, no, I don't want to stay in the Reserves, I want out. If I'm out, I'm out. But now, if I'm gonna have to stay in the Reserve, I'm not out, but I said I don't want to stay in the Reserves. They tried to get me to do that, too, and I said, no, I don't want to do that. So I didn't get called back, but they still came and talked to me.

JW: Right, right. Did you and your wife have any children?

RH: Yeah, we got one boy and he is a real good boy. He never did drink, like I did, he never did get on drugs or anything, he was always a good student. And he went out here to Westark his first two years, and he made the "Math Student of the Year" when he graduated. And then he went to OU, Oklahoma University, and he graduated out there. And he taught one year in Sand Springs, then he went back and got his Master's Degree and came back over here and went to teaching for Westark Junior College over there. And he was over there until the first of this year and he got the Director's job over at Carl Albert of Sallisaw Campus, and that's what he's doing now, he's got a good job over there. And he taught, he's a calculus, had an MS Degree, calculus and whatever goes with an MS Degree, math, science and calculus. And what's the other one? Trig. He taught all that.

JW: Well, he's done well.

RH: Yeah, he was good at it. And he's got a son and he's married, his wife is a teacher, also. She teaches there at Muldrow and he's got that job at Carl Albert, so they got a nice home, a nice place. We got quite a bit of land out there, oh, I don't know, two, three hundred acres, but lot of it's in the city limits.

JW: Well, Muldrow's grown a lot.

RH: Yeah, yeah, it has. I've sold some of it and give some of it away there where I live. Well, the last piece they got from me was for their baseball diamond. They got a pretty nice school out there.

JW: I hadn't been there in a long time.

RH: Well, my dad's place, my brother was a lot older than me, he got, course, his half of it. And they own about forty acres of what he had plus I sold them another six or seven acres from mine for the school, and I bought the other half of what he had on the north side of the Old 64 Highway, my son has that now. So I got another place down on Redland that I lease out to a guy that pastures it.

JW: Well, is there anything you want to say about your life since you've been home, since the war was over, the good, the bad?

RH: Yeah. Well, I'm not going to blame it on anything but myself, but like I said, that much combat or any combat maybe will change you. And so I guess you'd say it was like a party, like to drink. But then 24 once this Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder hit me, and I didn't know, didn't get treatment for it for a long time. I drank a lot, but I always, I always held my job down. I didn't drink on the job, but I drank every night. That's about the only way I'd get any sleep. And I did that; and course, that didn't make it easy on my wife or my son. I have regrets that I did that, that I was bad to drink. But I didn't get irresponsible with it, or you know, just that only. I still, I still kept my job and my standard in my work and all that, but I just drank too much, which that causes friction between you and your wife, and sometimes between your child, even though I didn't mistreat him, but you know how drinking will do.

JW: It alters your behavior and your thinking process.

RH: It alters your behavior, and your wife will mention it to you and then you don't take kindly to that, and that starts an argument. And I never did beat her up or any of those things, but still, you might say words that you wished you hadn't.

JW: Right. But you were in affect self-medicating yourself, in order to get rid of all that or calm it down or something?

RH: Yeah. I was on the average, for awhile there, I would go to the emergency room. I would average at least once a week and sometimes twice. And Dr. Lambiotte was my doctor at that time, and I doubt that he even knew I'd even been in combat, or I don't know if he knew I'd even been in the service. He probably had it figured out, I don't know, most our age did. But I didn't get the proper medicine for it, but I did the drinking and I'd have hellacious hangovers. But like I said, I didn't let that keep me from going to work; but I put in some hard, hard mornings.

JW: About how old were you when it occurred to you that this was not just being sorry, but signs of a problem that--

RH: Well, when I actually found out, I read this in a magazine, I think it was a medical journal or something, where they had diagnosed this Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and what the evidence was. And I told my wife, I said, "That's what's wrong with me, I know that's what's wrong with me."

JW: I assume that was fairly late in life. I assume that you figured that out fairly late in life?

RH: Yeah, yeah.

JW: That doesn't sound like 1950s talk to me.

RH: No, no. I did that for several years, I did it for the '50s, the '60s; but then in the '70s, I started getting treatment for it. And when Lambiotte retired, he had it figured out, he knew what's wrong with me. He told me, he said, and he was on me continuously to quit drinking. And so when I got the proper medicine for it, I did quit drinking. But I can say this, I quit it and it didn't bother me. Lot of people can't do that.

JW: Lot of people can't just quit. 25

RH: No, and I done smoking the same way. I've got a pretty good will power when it comes to something. If I want to do it, I can usually do it; but drinking, it didn't bother me as much quitting it as it did to quit smoking. That nagged me for a year, but I did quit both of them. And here I am, eighty-one-and-a-half-years-old, and I can still navigate, still get around. I've been blessed like that.

JW: Did your brother live to be an old man?

RH: No, he died. He died when he was seventy-five; but what got him, he'd been a mine worker. Then, during the war, he worked the shipyards and got asbestos on his lungs, on top of a coal deal. And he died just like my dad did, that's what killed him is he couldn't breathe, stuff ruined his lungs, and he never did draw a dime on that. You know, the government is a funny thing. They had a fund for this asbestos fund if you had that in your lungs. And then the miners had the fund for black lung.

Well, each one wanted the other one to pay it, he had both. So even with a lawyer, he never didn't draw a penny, never drawed a penny. Now, my dad did, but he died pretty shortly after that went in, so my mother, my mother drawed some.

JW: Was your son ever drawn to the military, did he ever--

RH: No. He just come at the age where he wasn't drafted and he didn't volunteer.

JW: Okay. I just wondered.

RH: Yeah, he--

JW: If your service caused him to either want to or not want to.

RH: I'd say it probably caused him to not want to. But now, as far as he knew I'd been in combat; but other than that, that's all he knew until the last five years.

JW: I was going to say, did you just kind of not talk about it until recently?

RH: That's right.

JW: That's pretty common.

RH: Even my mother and dad didn't know. They knew I had been overseas, they knew I'd been in combat, my wife knew it; but to what extent, they didn't know, and I didn't ever talk about it. And the reason I didn't is because you can't talk about it, it's very hard to talk about it without crying. And on top of that, you don't want them to know it for some reason. But then after, well, here about, let's see, about seven years ago, my son, he started asking me more questions about it and I started talking. And it's a funny thing, I had these ribbons and stuff, but they had never given them to me, had never issued them to me. And he said, "Dad, where is your campaign ribbons and so forth?" And I said, "Well, they never did, they was supposed to shipped them to me after I was discharged, they didn't have any at Norman and I never did get 26 them." So he wrote St. Louis for me and we went up there to a baseball game, St. Louis Cardinals, and so they shipped part of them, they

missed two that I had coming they didn't send. And then your foreign ones, they wouldn't mess with them at all. You had to get them, they had another place there in St. Louis and we went over there, and we had to buy them; but I had several awards like that. Now, I never did win a Bronze Star or Silver Star or anything like that. But the way I look at it right now, they hand out some of these like Vietnam and maybe in this war now, a Bronze Star, to me, it isn't the value it used to be. They didn't pass them out for just about anything. To me, every Marine that landed on Saipan, you talk about valor and courage, just to land on one of them beaches and doing that, to me, every Marine that landed there ought to had at least a Bronze Star. Because I read these books, and I read what they did, what they got them for in Vietnam and so forth, and that was kind of an every day occurrence. It doesn't make me jealous or hate it or nothing like that, but it's just the thought that everything changes. I don't say I deserve one because I wasn't an exception; fact, I was probably, I rate myself as being a mediocre pharmacist mate or corpsman because I was young and I probably didn't study as hard as I ought to have studied. And I regretted a lot of times when I was in combat, that I wasn't better or could do things than I was. But I tried and did the best I could anyway, regardless.

JW: And you know, compared to today, medicine was pretty primitive.

RH: Yeah.

JW: In other words, you were the best one in the class, there wasn't a whole lot to do, especially out in combat.

RH: Yeah. When I first went in, we was using sulfa.

JW: Yeah, penicillin was a great--

RH: They came out with penicillin just about the time I went overseas, and we had that and we could give them shots. But we had sulfa powders, we'd sprinkle them with that and then we'd put that compress bandage on and give them a shot of morphine and try to kill their pain as best as we could, and try to stop the bleeding. But basically, that's about all that I could do because a lot of those top corpsmen, they came in there with pre-medical experience like they'd been going to some school, maybe undertaking school or whatever. But just take a country kid that'd never been around anything like that at all, so I was a low-class corpsman, what I'd call myself. But I did what I had to do and did it without having broke down one time. And that's saying something, when you can go through something like that. Now, when this happened about my friend, I went off and cried, couldn't help it. I mean I just couldn't understand why he would do something like that.

JW: All of that is just such a giant load for a nineteen, twenty-year-old kid of any generation at any time, to have to be in 27 that. That's a big load.

RH: Yeah. As I look back at it, I don't see how I did it. I don't see how anybody did it. I mean you got to have something to do it. And there was some of them that couldn't do it. But they didn't come in droves, but there were a few that couldn't do it, couldn't handle it.

JW: And you know, I'll never be interviewing any of them. The people that didn't make it over the World War II experiences that they had aren't around, I can't interview them, they're gone. You know what I mean?

RH: Right.

JW: And I'm sorry that we don't know more about how it looked to somebody who couldn't take it. We just don't have any clue.

RH: Well, we have and some people get the name mixed up, but battle fatigue and what was the word they used?

JW: It was shell-shocked in World War I.

RH: Shell-shock, yeah; but that's a different thing than Post- Traumatic Stress Disorder, it's just different. This happens on the battlefield. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder happens later, this is what gets to you fifteen years later or fourteen years later. But the people that break down on the battlefield, that's your shell-shock.

JW: Battle fatigue?

RH: Battle fatigue, and I seen them do that, and there was a treatment for that. You gave them these high powered shots, sometimes you had to give them that formaldehyde and stuff like that, shoot it in their hip.

JW: You know war is hell, and I really don't think that that's enough words to adequately say.

RH: Well, there's just so much that you can say. It's hard to describe as I wrote there in that deal. I mean it cannot be described exactly like it is and you can't tell the most horrible things and make it come out right.

JW: Beyond words?

RH: Yeah.

JW: Yeah, I can understand that.

RH: You sure can't. You can't, you can't go and talk about gathering a person up and putting what you think belongs to this one and that one belongs to that one, you just can't do it.

JW: Right, right; horrible thing.

RH: But on top of that, the worst thing, like I said, that I got into was getting those boys out of the water after they had been there a few days, decomposed bodies, it's awful. I never will forget and it bothers me to this day.

JW: Right, right. 28

RH: And that's why I just don't understand, they should've got a lot more credit than what they got. But back then when I came home, course I didn't expect it when I came home, there wasn't one person, not one single person come and shook my hand and said we appreciate what you've done for our country and so forth, or even talked about it. Course, you didn't talk about it, but you would have, maybe, if they'd brought it up. But now, when I was in Pearl Harbor, my son and family went over to Pearl Harbor the summer of 2005, and I was showing them some of the places and so forth. And while I was over there at the sub base, I bought a World War II cap. And so once in a while, I wear that, I carry it in my pickup. And I have walked in Wal-Mart with that cap on, or even a restaurant or somewhere, and I have people come up to me and shake my hand and say we're proud.

JW: Well, you know, it was so common. Everybody had gone off to do it, and I think that that's what made it, at the time, you didn't look over at your neighbor and say, "Boy, you did a real good job in World War II," because you'd been there. And the world has changed, perception has changed and it took this long, I guess, for people to wake up and think, "Well, that was a hell of a deal, that was a great big thing." And you know, it took three or four years out of your life that I'm sure you could have had a much better time doing something else, so--

RH: Well, you might say the best time of your life.

JW: Yeah.

RH: Could have been.

JW: And so I don't know why it took fifty years for people to figure it out, but it did.

RH: I know.

JW: And thank goodness, we did, we finally did.

RH: But I have them do that quite often.

JW: Yeah. It's probably gonna get worse before it gets better, too, because it just-- I don't know. You know, you got Steven Spielberg to thank for that and some of these other guys--

RH: You know, I watched that film that he made, him and--

JW: Tom Hanks?

RH: Yeah. That has got some of the most accurate combat scenes in it.

JW: That's what I've heard.

RH: Of any movie that I've seen, and I've seen several of them here lately. I didn't use to even go to them, I didn't go to 4th of July picnic, either. But anyway, I watched that and it is portrayed about as accurate as--

JW: Right. Well, I read a lot about that when it came out and that's what the guy said is that's what it sounded like, that's what it 29 looked like, and the action was just like that, just as hard and heavy as you could. And that's what shocked people that went to see it, they just couldn't believe that anybody got out alive, as much fire power--

RH: Yeah, it's amazing how anybody gets out alive, it is.