

**Interview of John “Jack” Watson  
Interviewed by Todd DePastino  
Upper St. Clair, Pennsylvania  
January 7, 2015  
Transcribed by Elyse Grasser**

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JW: My name is Jack Watson. I live at Friendship Village in Upper St. Clair. Sunday, December 7<sup>th</sup>, I was a student for high school up at St. Vincent Prep in Latrobe. We had study halls on Sunday afternoon, and so, December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941, Sunday afternoon, we were in study hall. They were kind of informal but you had to be in study hall. We were there and one of the priests came into the study hall and said, “Pearl Harbor has just been bombed.” And that didn’t mean anything to most of us, because we thought, “Where the hell is Pearl Harbor?” I guess that most people on that day probably reacted to, because we had no idea where it was. And then somebody said it’s in the Hawaiian Islands, somebody knew that. So, we zeroed in on that pretty quick. And there wasn’t much discussion as I can recall as, “What do we do now? What happens to us now?” That wasn’t part of it. Just the immediate revelation that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor, and this probably meant we were going to war. I don’t think it was until Monday or Tuesday that we really started talking about this. And I thought, “I think we’re gonna be involved.” Us personally, the students. Because we were seniors. So that’s my recollection of Pearl Harbor. There wasn’t any panic, it was just shock. I’m sure we went through maps and geography books to try to find out exactly where Hawaii was. There weren’t any pictures. All of this came through on the radio – there wasn’t any television at that point. So this was all coming through [...] by radio. And I don’t recall hearing from any of my family, like my dad, I don’t recall. So I thought, “Maybe it’s not that big of a story,” but it would be a tremendous story.

JW: I wanted to join the Marine Corps. So, I left Penn State in November and came to Pittsburgh, went down to the Post Office and went to the Marine Corps recruiters, I guess, and told them I wanted to join the Marine Corps. And they said, “Fine.” So, they took all the information and told me – this was probably mid-November, something like that – and they told me to come back on December 7<sup>th</sup>. That would be December 7<sup>th</sup> 1942. And I’d be sworn in and sent to Parris Island, you know. So, that was okay. I went out and I think I got a job someplace working in a department store or something. [...] In the meantime, my cousin had enlisted in the Marines, and I was due to leave on December 7<sup>th</sup>, and he was due to leave on December, I think, 16<sup>th</sup> or something like that. And he said, “Why don’t you see if you can get it changed and then we’ll both leave at

the same time.” And I thought, “That’s a good idea.” So, I went down to the Marine Corps depot, and I told my story, that my cousin enlisted and we wanted to leave together and I wanted to leave on December 16<sup>th</sup> instead of December 7<sup>th</sup>. And they said, “Oh, okay,” – I thought they said “okay.” And so, anyhow, about the 5<sup>th</sup> of December of 1942, somehow I heard that the Marine Corps was stopping enlistments. That didn’t make sense because the war was just starting then, really. But I thought, “That’s not good.” I wanted to enlist; I did not want to be drafted. I wanted to volunteer. And so I went back to the Post Office and I told my story. I said, “I was initially supposed to leave on December 7<sup>th</sup>, I wanted it changed to the 16<sup>th</sup> and you did that, but I hear you’re not taking any volunteers.” He said, “We’re taking volunteers. And you’re scheduled to go *today*.” So, they had never changed it. I said, “That’s interesting, okay.” And they said, “Be back here at 5 o’clock, today.”

My dad worked downtown at the time, so I called my dad on the telephone and said, “Guess what, I’m leaving tonight, today.” He picked me up and, I don’t think we packed. What was to pack? You didn’t take anything with you I don’t think. But anyhow, I know we went over to see my grandmother and a couple of aunts to tell them I was leaving. So we did that, and then we, I think we probably went to – my oldest sister at that time had entered the Mercy order as a nun. She was at the convent, so I’m sure we went up to see her. And then I reported back to the Marine Corps recruit depot at 5 o’clock as I was told. They put us up overnight in the Y – I think it was the YWCA, not the YMCA – but they put us up for the night there, and the next morning we were leaving for Parris Island. We were up and running at probably around 7 o’clock, walked from the YMCA [sic] on the Boulevard of the Allies over to the Pennsy [Pennsylvania?] Station. My dad was at the Pennsy Station waiting for us. So, I saw him and said goodbye to him and then they put us on a train and we were gone. [Chuckles] It didn’t take long to make the decision to go because it was already made for me.

Being in the orphanage and being at St. Vincent, I was used to not a normal family life, so this was just an extension of what I’d always been doing. You’re a part of a group, and that’s what boot camp was. But you made connections there and you did things there that stick with you for a long time. With all Marines, I think their boot camp buddies are usually their best buddies throughout. You meet other people, you associate with other people, but you always go back to your boot camp. A lot of names I do not remember, but a lot of faces and personalities, I remember them all. One of them was a guy by the name of Ralph Stimmel. And Ralph Stimmel – he and I went in from Pittsburgh at the same time. That’s how we ended up in the same boot platoon. Ralph was from Wilksburg. We went off to boot camp together, and then later on we were both in the 4<sup>th</sup> Division together, but he had gone with the original 4<sup>th</sup>, while I started on my sojourn to become a radar technician. Ralph had gone to the 23<sup>rd</sup> regiment, and he fought in all the battles, he was in Roi-Namur, Saipan, Tinian, and Iwo Jima. He got hit on Iwo

Jima, he was evacuated – he wasn't hit seriously – they put him back in, he came back in to Iwo. I didn't know all this until we got back to Maui after Iwo Jima, and I caught up with Ralph back there and he told me all this. "Hell I got hit and they didn't even send me home, they sent me back into the island." Ralph was one of those guys, I guess I always felt sorry for Ralph because that seemed to be Ralph's plate in life. If anything wrong could happen to you it was going to happen to Ralph. He ended up, I saw him one day in Wilkinsburg, 'cause I worked in Wilkinsburg, it ended up that Ralph was working for the Post Office Department there. I saw him near the Post Office one day and we talked, we got together one time after that for lunch. And I never saw Ralph again; I think he was transferred, I don't know, but I never saw Ralph after that. But I never forgot him either.

Our whole boot platoon went up to Camp Lejeune in a big truck convoy that took the whole, I don't know how many of us, there were probably – there was our camp boot platoon and probably two other ones – so there'd probably be two- or three hundred men in trucks riding from Parris Island, South Carolina, to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. But we got there and we arrived there on my birthday, and the reason I know that [is]: we were in formation, we had just arrived - we got off the trucks - we were in formation, and somebody came out and said, "Private Watson." "Yeah?" He said, "You have a phone call." [Chuckles]. I didn't know if it was the President or who. Anyhow, they took me to a barracks or someplace. It was my dad. My dad was calling me on my birthday. And somehow, through – back then you worked through operators, you had to call the operator to make a connection for you – somehow my dad had called at Parris Island. They said, "He's not here," he followed wherever I went, and anyhow, somehow my dad got a phone call through to me. So, we sat there and talked for a little while. But anyhow, [...] I don't know how they do, we all had taken tests when we went in and during boot camp, we were always being tested, and I guess I showed some inclination toward that kind of thing. I was told I was going to be a radio operator. That was okay with me, I thought, "That's fine." I think that was 6 weeks or something like that. Sitting in a classroom all day long with earphones on and some guy sitting up there with a key just tapping away. First, very slowly so you'd get an idea of what this code was. You didn't look at the code and then learn it, you listened to it. You learned by listening. That was the only way you could learn it quickly. You started off at, I don't know, 4 words a minute. And then they kept increasing it as you got better, they would speed it up. And I think I ended up being able to take 18 words a minute which was pretty good. So, I finished radio operator school, and I think I got a promotion, I think that's when I got my PFC stripes, after I finished radio operator school. I just assumed I was going back to where Ralph Stimmel was because everyone from my boot camp had already been assigned to one of three. [...] There were 3 infantry regiments in the 4<sup>th</sup> Division: the 23<sup>rd</sup>, the 24<sup>th</sup>, and the 25<sup>th</sup>. The 24<sup>th</sup> was being formed at Pendleton. That's why my boot platoon and everybody else ended up in the 24<sup>th</sup>.

Well they said, “No, you’re leaving here and you’re going to Chicago.” I thought, “What the hell am I gonna do in Chicago?” “Well you’re gonna go to school.” “Why am I gonna go to school?” So, I went up there and we went to a place called Wright Junior College. You can say what you want, but the armed forces had a remarkable educational system. They could teach you how to become a radio, or a radar technician without any horsing around. You didn’t have to take Spanish, you didn’t have to take home literature, you didn’t have to take housekeeping. You just studied radio. And that’s how you learned to do things. So anyhow, they wanted to determine how qualified I was. They sent me to this school in Chicago, Wright Junior College, and it was basically to check and see how good you were in math. Because a lot of our time was spent on algebra and calculus and geometry. Of course, you were always training during all of this. You were always on maneuvers, you were always having close-ordered drills. It was always the Marine Corps part of it. But anyhow, that month in Chicago, then we were to be assigned to the sequel to that, which would be an upgrade. And so there were a couple of places you could go, and one place I know was someplace in Oklahoma, and the other place that you could go from there was Grove City College in Pennsylvania. Since I was from Pittsburgh, Grove City College appealed to me. I thought, “That’s pretty nice. I won’t be too far from home.”

So, the orders come out. [...] There were two Watson’s in that class, me and another Watson, and the orders came out that I was to go to Oklahoma and the other Watson was to go to Grove City. And he was from Oklahoma. I said, “I think they got this screwed up.” So we didn’t say anything to anybody, but he just went to Oklahoma and I went to Grove City. It wasn’t ’til, probably, a month later that they found out the paperwork wasn’t there but they couldn’t do anything else. They exchanged the paperwork and my paperwork caught up to me at Grove City and I assume his caught up to him in Oklahoma. But, we made our own rules in that. Anyhow, I was at Grove City for, I think, 3 months. And that was pure radio. That was learning radio circuitry, building a radio. There were probably 40 of us in that class, I’m not quite sure. And, by that time, being a PFC, and everyone else was a Private, the higher rank is in charge, always. So, I was in charge of all these guys. I would do the close-ordered drills and all that; we’d get out and they had a football field down there, we’d get out of there and do our close-ordered drill. We’d do our calisthenics down there and all that stuff. As PFC I was in charge of this whole crew. I was only, still, 18 years old or something, I don’t know.

So, anyhow, one time, [chuckles] they always had somebody on guard duty. Now I never understood this, at Grove City College, why they needed somebody on guard duty at the door. Who the hell was gonna come in or out? But they had a person on guard, one of our group was always on guard duty at the front door to the dorm. Some people in the group threw water on the guard as he was walking his post. They threw water out the

window and hit the guard. Well, the captain didn't like that. He wanted to know who did it. Well, of course, nobody was gonna own up to doing it. And he said "There's no liberty at all, forever. There's no liberty while you're here." And I thought, "That's a bunch of crap." So, I talked to the guys. I knew who did it, everybody knew who did it. And I went to them and I said, "Everybody's being hit. What you did was fun, but we're all being hurt, we're all being punished for it," I said, "If I could go to the captain and talk to him and get you some KP duty or something, would that be alright with you guys?" And they said – there were 3 of them – they said, "Oh yeah, that's fine." So, I went over to the captain's office, I knock on the door, walk in, and I told him the story. And I said, "I know who did it, and I'll tell you, but there's a provision: the punishment can't be anything more than KP." Now, KP duty at Grove City College wasn't too tough anyhow. He said that was a deal. I went back and told these guys that, they turned themselves in. He court martialed them. He court martialed them. Now, you know what that did to me. I went back to his office and no PFC ever talked to a captain like I did. I told him he was a rotten son of a bitch. That he did me dirty. I said, "You put me in a position that I'll probably never be able to get out of, because I had my men fess up to this thing based on what you told me, and you didn't stick to your word." And I said, "Now I'm crap." And, these guys eventually forgave me. One guy, Helen and I met him one time after we came out of the service. His name was Rabbit Lewis. Rabbit Lewis was from Waynesburg. Anyhow, Rabbit was one of the guys that turned himself in. And those guys actually forgave me. "It wasn't your doing." That was the bad part about me being at Grove City.

Then we finished at Grove City, and then the next part of this course was [to] really get into the radar because they had decided that, you had the math skills, at Grove City they determined you do radio, and you could learn radio. Now you're ready to move on to advanced radio in Albany radar. So, we boarded a train in Grove City. And, of course, I'm in charge of all of these guys going all the way across the country. 18 years old and I'm taking all of these guys across the country to someplace in San Francisco. We made it. But it was funny because then, when we finished at Grove City, we got another promotion. When I came out of Grove City I was a Corporal. That was nice. I was really getting up in the world now, I was a Corporal. So, when I took this group across the country I was a Corporal in charge of, I don't know, 25, 30 guys. Of course the conductors on the train were very helpful – they didn't let me get lost too far. We got into San Francisco, and went to Treasure Island, which was a naval base. This was a Navy school and in our class were 30, 35 guys and maybe 25, 30 would be sailors and a few marines. So it was mostly a Navy school. And, that's when I started thinking, "Why am I learning radar?" I had never heard of any radar in the Marine Corps. Well I thought, "I'm only a corporal, I don't know what's going on." This was to be a six-month course, and every month was like a semester. You completed this month and you went on to the next one and did that one. So after about 2 or 3 months I thought to myself, "I don't want to be

here.” Because by this time, the 4<sup>th</sup> Division had already gone over to the Pacific. They had done Roi-Namur, they hadn’t done Saipan yet. But they had taken Roi-Namur, and I knew that, we were getting all the news about what they were doing. And I decided I didn’t want to be in school. I didn’t join the Marine Corps to get an education. I wanted to be part of whatever they were doing. So I thought, “I’ll flunk out.” So that made perfect sense to me. Well it didn’t to the [“mucky-mucks”] because I did flunk out, that’s not difficult to do, you just don’t do your work. So, I did flunk out, and the captain called me in and we had a heart-to-heart talk and what he said was, “Your records indicate that you should be able to do this. You’re going back into school. You’re not gonna flunk out, because if you do, I’m gonna court martial you. You’re gonna go to the brig and get a dishonorable discharge.” Now they’re pretty good odds – that’s a pretty good reason to go back to school.

Now, my original class had already gone on, and I had to wait for the next class to come along so I could join them. So that’s when I met Rod Watt. Rod Watt was in this other class. So we went through and we completed this course. The last month of it was when they really cleared us for secrecy because that’s when we were working on the actual radar equipment, which was top secret then. I remember we went to class over in this one barracks. We could not take any notes out, we couldn’t take any books out. They searched us when we went in, they searched us when we came out. At that point in time, radar was a top [...] secret thing. Anyhow, we finally came out of that and got – I did graduate from radar technician school – and everybody had a spec number, like a rifleman had a spec number, a medic had a spec number, I had a spec number. I think my spec number when I came out of Treasure Island, I think it was 749. I could be wrong on that but I think that was my spec number. And that meant you were a radar technician. But it was about then I thought, “What the hell am I gonna do with a – the Marine Corps does not have any radar.” Soon as I figured that out I guess the rest of them figured it out too, but the thing about being the spec number 749, the thing that went along with that, was that you were classified “non-combat.” You could not be assigned to a combat unit because you were of value, and they weren’t gonna put you up there to get shot right away. You had no combat duty. And I didn’t really like that, but that went along with the territory. So, anyhow, we left there and at that point the 24<sup>th</sup> replacement draft, they called it, was being formed in Camp Pendleton. They sent us from San Francisco down to Camp Pendleton.

TD: Didn’t you say they gave you the option to go on a submarine?

JW: Oh yeah, they did, yeah because submarine duty was volunteer. Still is, I think, and always was. They were not getting enough Navy people to volunteer for sub duty. And they needed radar technicians because radar on a submarine was key. So, they opened it up to the Marine Corps. They said, “Any of you guys want to volunteer?” And I thought about it to tell you the truth. I thought, “That’s a pretty good adventure.” And I thought,

“No, no, no, I like to see the blue sky, I don’t want to be under the water.” I don’t know how many people they got to tell you the truth, if anybody, I don’t know. They probably got somebody.

But anyhow, we got to Camp Pendleton, and here I am with my non-combat status and we’re in this replacement battalion that is supposedly training to replace people in the 24<sup>th</sup> Regiment. About that time, somebody figured out that, with this spec number, we were of no value to our regiment, because they didn’t have radar anyhow. So, it was at that point that they changed our spec number, and I don’t remember what the new one was, but the “non-combat” was removed. We were now combat available. That was the situation I was in as the 24<sup>th</sup> replacement was being formed. We were all combat eligible.

When we first arrived at Camp Pendleton, we came in from San Francisco, groups came in from all over the country, and the 24<sup>th</sup> replacement was very loosely run. I don’t think we even had a commanding officer at that point. Just a bunch of guys that got together because they were sent there. Since it was pretty loose, there wasn’t much discipline. Frankly, a couple guys went home. I know a couple guys, a guy from Irwin, he lives in Irwin, Pennsylvania – Turney [the guy’s name] – Turney actually left Camp Pendleton and went home. He had a buddy at Camp Pendleton that, anytime they had a muster, when they called the roll his buddy would say, “Here!” and as far as they cared, Turney was still there. This went on for a long time [...]. We eventually got a new captain that came in and he saw what was going on and he put a stop to it right away. He said, “Tomorrow morning at muster, as muster is called, you will step forward.” A lot of guys didn’t step forward because they weren’t there. And Rod Watt was one of them. All these guys were called into the office to account for why they weren’t at muster. Everybody had a different story: “I was at sick bay,” “I went to see the chaplain,” “I was visiting my buddy who twisted his ankle,” all this stuff was going on, and the captain said, “Okay.” Rod Watt said, “I was in San Diego visiting my cousin,” and he said, “I got back late, and I didn’t get here in time for muster.” He got court martialed. [Chuckles] Rod got busted from Sergeant to Corporal, and he was Corporal Watt from there on in. [...] Rod was the most honest man I ever knew in my life, and still today, but he got caught. And it wasn’t fair but Rod said, “Yeah, that’s the deal.” Actually for me, it ended up good because I still had my rank as Sergeant, and Rod was one of my corporals. Rod, and D. E. Nelson, and [not sure, another person’s name?] were the three corporals I had. And they were all excellent people. I could ask them to do anything and knew it would be done.

The 24<sup>th</sup> replacement eventually shipped out of Camp Pendleton and went to Maui. But we didn’t know where we were going, of course. They didn’t tell you until you got there. But on the way there, and I think about it now, this is really humorous. On the way there, they give you this debriefing, because you’re going to this island. They’re gonna tell you all about the island, what the natives are like, what diseases are there, what

plant life might be there. Hell, we were going to Maui! And, we didn't know it. Maui today is quite different from what it was then. Maui, then, was a huge pineapple plantation. Dole Pineapple owned the island, I think. [...] I remember landing, coming into the dock, at Maui, and they're unloading our equipment, and all I could smell was pineapple. I loved pineapple – that's all you could smell on that island, because the whole island was one huge pineapple field. I said that to somebody that was down at the dock – I guess a dock worker, I don't know – and I said, "Oh my God that's wonderful stuff," I said, "I love pineapple, I love that smell." He said, "By the time you leave here, you'll change your mind." [Laughs] He was true, he was right. After a lot of smelling pineapple, I didn't want to smell any more pineapple.

There was Maui radio you could listen to. It was the only radio station you could get. But in the morning, they always had announcements on the Maui radio station. Either, "There would [sic] be no work in the pineapple fields today." This left all the natives know that they didn't have to go to work today, but that was the only way they could let them know. They all listened to the radio, Maui radio, and that was the only thing that was on there. Some music and these periodic announcements. So, it was always good for the natives when they found out that there was no work in the pineapple field. [...] We got off the ship. We're watching them unload the ship, and they're unloading our C bags which were the big bags we carried all – everything you owned was in the C bag. We're watching them unload these C bags, and one goes in the drink. And Rod Watt said, "I bet that's mine." [Laughs] I said, "Aw, come on Rod." We got up at camp, we get our C bags, guess what? Rod's was the one that went in the drink. Everything in it was soaking wet. And Rod was very careful with everything. It was all organized and everything. It was a mess. Rod didn't have much faith in the dock loaders at that point. But anyhow, we got up to camp, and we were still the 24<sup>th</sup> replacement. We were now in the area with the 24<sup>th</sup> Regiment. But we trained separately. When we went on maneuvers with them, we went on maneuvers as a separate unit. We landed as a separate unit. We used to do practice landings on Maui. They'd sometimes take us out in boats, sometimes they'd just take us over there in trucks, and we would just walk into the surf, and then they'd say, "Okay, now you're coming in." And we'd come in and it was something we never understood until we got to Iwo Jima because we were training for Iwo Jima. We would always come ashore and then immediately turn right and go up the island. Because when we got to Iwo that was our assignment: to land, turn right, and go up the east coast. That was the 24<sup>th</sup>'s responsibility on Iwo. So, all our training reflected that.

Maneuvers were, most times, overnight. They didn't care where you slept, but they always had chow for you, they always had a chow wagon [that] came along. So, they always fed you but they didn't care where you slept. But you had to be ready the next morning to go and do whatever it was they wanted to do. The 24<sup>th</sup> Regiment had



specific assignments that they were doing; as the 24<sup>th</sup> replacement, we didn't. We were kind of told what to do, but we weren't told. So we just trained the best we could.

It was probably December – because we boarded the ships for Iwo in January 6<sup>th</sup>, I believe it was – so it was late in December, maybe even after Christmas. From our camp, on Maui, which was halfway up [...] Haleakala was the volcano, and our base camp was halfway up that. So we were up on the hill, and you could see down into the harbor at Kahului. [...] One day we looked out, and [we thought,] “My God, here are all these ships down there.” We found out what they were. They were troop transports, coming in to get us, because we were all going to Iwo Jima. We didn't know where we were going. Of course, the brass knew. But how far down in the ranks that went, I never found out. We were taken down to the docks in trucks to board the ships. I'm standing on the dock, and the ship looked to be 90 feet high. It was the U.S.S. Artemis. And I hear somebody up on the deck, “Hey, Watson! Hey, Watson!” I look up and here's this guy that had been in this radar school with me. He was with the Navy. His name was Dick South, and he was from Pittsburgh. So, he and I became good friends. But here he ended up as the radar technician on board the U.S.S. Artemis. He spotted me down on the dock. So, as soon as I got on board I looked him up, and sure enough, he was the radar technician on board there, in charge of all of their communication equipment. As such, he had a workshop back on the fan tail of the ship. Well, troop ships weren't the easiest thing to ride on in your life, and you slept in slung hammocks down in the hold. Nothing was very comfortable. But I opted that Dick's workbench was more comfortable than any bunk down in the hold. So, I established that as my headquarters. And we hung out all the time in Dick's radio shack. Not the Radio Shack you know today, but the radio shack. And it was interesting because we gathered back there. When you're on board the ship and going someplace, there isn't that much to do. They make you exercise as much as possible – they always had calisthenics – they always called you for assembly. You had to line up and report in every morning. Where they thought people were going, I don't know. But you always had to do that. [...]

We left Maui on board the U.S.S. Artemis, and went and sailed out of the harbor at Kahului, went around the other side of the island, and made some practice landings in the place where we used to go on maneuvers. Because we knew it all. Now, as the replacement battalion, we did not get off the Artemis and go ashore. But the 4<sup>th</sup> Division did, they made their practice landing there. So, they made a couple practice landings, and then we left there. There were probably... I don't know how many ships carried the 4<sup>th</sup> Division. Maybe six? I have no idea. Maybe six. We, ultimately, left Maui and then went to the island of Hawaii, Pearl Harbor. And that was an amazing thing, to fall [pull?] into Pearl Harbor the first time. Here were these – the Arizona is still there. And you saw this was where it all started. And that made you think [tearfully].

Everything had been routine. One day leads into the next, and then, all of a sudden, you see that and you think, “Holy shit.” I went back, immediately, to St. Vincent. And that day that I heard about it. This is what I heard about. All this stuff happened that day. And it was emotional, I think. And probably still is. But, anyhow, it was hard to say how many ships were in there. Just, you were tied up side by side by side. We were there for a couple of days because the 5<sup>th</sup> Division had their base training camp at the island of Hawaii, the big island. That was their training site, ours was on Maui. So the 5<sup>th</sup> Division came up from Hawaii to Pearl Harbor, and this big convoy was being formed. When we left there, it was the most astounding sight you could see, because we started going out of that harbor, and then you get out of the harbor and you look around, and there’s just ships everywhere. Troop transports from these two divisions, there are aircraft carriers, there are battle ships, there are destroyers. Because this was a huge convoy that the Japanese would like to get a hold of. They probably knew where we were going, although we didn’t know where we were going. They probably knew. So, we had all kinds of protection around us, this huge convoy going on. And I have no idea how many ships were in that, but as far as you could look you could see ships. They had, I think carriers on the outside, maybe battleships next, and the smallest as you got into ... we had destroyers just immediately beside us. They were escorting us. We set sail and it was amazing sight to look out there and see, no matter where you looked you could see a ship. And we were right in the middle of it, we were being protected.

So, the first place we stopped, we stopped at Enewetak [Atoll] because they had to resupply. I don’t know they managed to resupply all these ships, but they did. We had to take on provisions, and they had all that stacked at Enewetak [Atoll]. So we stopped there and restocked. Then we left there and went to Saipan. The 4<sup>th</sup> Division had taken Saipan and Tinian probably six months prior to that. We got to Saipan, and they wanted to do one more practice landing. Now, we, as a replacement battalion, did not participate in that landing. Because, we weren’t supposed to land at Iwo Jima anyhow. But we watched them go in and make their practice landings and [when] everybody got back on board ships, the convoy took off again.

TD: Was there scuttlebutt of where you were going?

JW: Not that I recall.

TD: Okay, because how many islands are there in the Pacific, it could be anywhere right?

JW: Well, yeah. There probably was. But I don’t recollect hearing any scuttlebutt. Which is odd because there was scuttlebutt everywhere. So, there must have been. Formally, we found out, shortly after we left Saipan – because there was no stopping after that – and then that’s when they broke out the maps. And this time, like I said when we were coming to Maui, they told us about the natives and they told us about the plant life, well this did the same thing with Iwo Jima only it was a little bit more serious now.

TD: What did they say about Iwo Jima?

JW: They were saying that it was a volcanic island, it was only 2 miles wide and 4 miles long, it had a big mountain on one end of it. They were showing us maps of what it was. And they said there are a lot of caves on the island. They said that there had been warships there and bombers taking runs at that for 72 days. Now, we're only a week or two away from landing in Iwo; they had already been bombing it for 72 days. So, based on this, they said it's going to be a kind of mop up operation. And we can probably have it all secured in three days. So that was okay, I thought, "We aren't going in anyhow, we're the replacement. We aren't going to do anything with this." So that was all they told us. Well, they showed us maps and they showed us the air fields. There was one air field that was really complete, it was just a little bit north of Suribachi. A little bit north of that was a second air field under construction, and we could see pictures of that. They had pictures. And there was a third air field up in the northern end that was really not much of an air field. It was just starting. So there basically three air fields. And, they explained this to us, the reason we had to take Iwo Jima was it was 750 miles from Tokyo. It was on a direct flight path between Tokyo and Guam and Tokyo and Saipan. So these planes that had been bombing Iwo Jima were also bombing Tokyo. They were coming through and being shot down. Not only that, as these bombers were leaving Saipan and Guam, they were heading right over Iwo Jima, heading for Tokyo. So, Tokyo would just radio them and say, "Hey, there's a run on the way." So, they knew what to expect. So for that reason and the fact that these bombers, when they left Tokyo after their run, were most often shot up, and would not have made it back to either Saipan or Guam. So, they needed a place to land, and with these air fields, one complete, that was an ideal place. So, the reason for taking Iwo Jima was to give these bombers a place for emergency landings. And that made sense.

We woke up one morning and knew we were stopped, and I was sleeping in Dick's radio shack. We came out on deck and we looked around and you could see all these ships standing still. When we came out of his shack, we were looking out to sea. Iwo Jima was back this way [gestures behind himself]. We went around on the other side of the ship and we could see it. We saw Iwo Jima and we saw Suribachi. We were only a mile, I think, from Iwo Jima at that point. We could see the details of the island. We could see all kinds of battle wagons. They had the battle ships right up near the shore, as close as they could get, because they were bombarding that place. They had some cruisers landing stuff. It was an amazing sight. To see all of this going on and thinking, "Somebody planned this whole thing. Somebody knew what they were doing." Communication back then was not what it is today, and I've often marveled at how all this was pulled together and everybody knew what they were doing. But I had an advantage being there with Dick South – because he not only had some binoculars that would allow us to really look into Iwo – being the radio and communications [...]

seaman of some kind, he had access to all the communication. So, in his shack, we could listen to all of the communication that was going on from ship to ship. We knew more than anybody about what was going on because we were listening to it. So, they had this pre-invasion bombardment going on, and they had battleships – I don't know how far off shore they were, but not very far – you can see them shelling Iwo Jima, just dropping shells in there. Then, they would stop, and here would come a whole string of bombers, drop bombs all over that island. Then, they would leave, and fighter planes would come in, and strafe the beach. So they'd clean that up. And they probably did 2, maybe 3 series of these events.

We watched the whole invasion. You could see the troops had gotten off in the middle of the night, like the 4<sup>th</sup> Division. In the original plan, the 23<sup>rd</sup> and the 25<sup>th</sup> Regiments of the 4<sup>th</sup> Division were to make the initial landing along with 3 infantry divisions of the 5<sup>th</sup> Division. So the 5<sup>th</sup> Division was to go in to the beach just north of Suribachi. And their detail was to go across and seal off the island because that was the narrow part of the island. Their responsibility was to go across and then go left and take Suribachi. Which they did in 6 days or something like that. It always amazed me that they were able to do it because how are you ever gonna get up that mountain? It was bare, really, and there wasn't any place to hide. So I thought, "How are you gonna get troops up there?" But that wasn't my call. I didn't have to worry about that. But, anyhow, we watched this whole pre-invasion and we could see all of the small boats loaded with the troops, lining up at what they call the line of departure. It was virtual line that was maybe 200, 300 yards off the beach of Iwo. At a certain time, there's somebody in charge of that line – we knew this because we were hearing it on the radio. We could hear all of this communication going on. We had it, but a lot of people there didn't know what was going on. They could see it, but didn't hear. But, we heard them approaching the line of departure. That's what they called the invisible line that all these barges, these landing craft, lined up. And at 0900 – I didn't hear it but you could see, like they fired a cannon, some signal. Then all these landing craft started, as one, into the beach. We were watching all this, and I think as we were watching, and everybody thought, "Why aren't they firing from Suribachi?" They know we're coming, they can see us. We've been here since 5 o'clock this morning. They must see us. And there wasn't any fire. And these guys got into the beach, and they announced – we heard it – that the first troops made the landing on the beach. The 5<sup>th</sup> Division was really the first one to hit the beach, and there was no fire. That was an odd silence. We didn't comprehend that from where we were a mile away. But it was odd that they have the keys to this whole thing and they're not using it. They're letting us in. Well, that worked. Then the 4<sup>th</sup> Division, two regiments, the 25<sup>th</sup> and the 23<sup>rd</sup>, landed abreast of the 5<sup>th</sup> Division. Just north of them. So, the two regiments from the 4<sup>th</sup> and the three from the 5<sup>th</sup> just moved in parallel away from the beach. Well that's when it started. Because that was their plan: to let them get ashore, and then they had everything zeroed in on 50 yards, 100 yards from the beach. And, you just

knew. [Getting emotional]. That was trouble. Because we could see – we had the binoculars – we can see guys being blown in the air.

So, we knew, I guess at that point, that the 3 day thing was off. This was gonna be a tougher thing. So, that was about 9 o'clock, and as I said they held the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division in reserve. And I don't know when the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division went in. My guess would be they went in at 10 o'clock because by then it was very obvious we needed help in there. So, anyhow, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division went in, and landed between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup>. They landed between those two divisions. And went straight across the island. That was their goal. The 24<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the 4<sup>th</sup> Division, which had been held in reserve, was called in at [...] 2 o'clock. So, when we knew that and we could see what the casualties were in there, I pretty much knew that [since] we were the replacement for the 24<sup>th</sup> Regiment, if they're going in now, we're probably not going to be very far behind them. They took a lot of hits. Particularly the 23<sup>rd</sup>. The 23<sup>rd</sup>, initially had the highest casualty rate of the 4<sup>th</sup> Division. They really walked into the middle of it. [Emotionally] Tough. Because this stuff never goes away. I can [view?] that today, as I did that day.

When we got word that the 24<sup>th</sup> Regiment had gone in and they were on the beach, and they couldn't move. They couldn't go forward 'cause there was too much heavy fire. That's when I was pretty sure that we were not gonna be far behind. And, I'm not quite sure, and my notes don't confirm one way or the other, I'm not quite sure when the 24<sup>th</sup> replacement draft went into Iwo. It was either the second day – it was not the first day. Because the 24<sup>th</sup> went in. We probably went in the second or maybe even the third day. I'm not clear on that anymore. Lieutenant Looker, who was my lieutenant, came to me and said, "The 24<sup>th</sup> went in, this is a lot different than what they expected. It's probably a sure thing that we're gonna go in." And he said, "But I'll let you know."

TD: By the time you got on the ship and it became kind of real, would you have been okay if you hadn't had to go in?

JW: No.

TD: You wanted to go in?

JW: I wanted to go in.

TD: You did? You were hoping to go in?

JW: Oh, I wasn't hoping to. No, I would rather not have gone in.

TD: You would rather not have gone in?

JW: Oh, absolutely.

TD: And at the time, you were thinking...

JW: I had no choice, but I would rather not have gone in.

TD: But, it seemed like you were hoping, you know, you wanted to get in on the fight. Was there some point when you realized you didn't want to get in on the fight as much as you had?

JW: Probably that morning, looking at that.

TD: You saw that, and realized.

JW: Yeah, I thought, "Oh, shit. I don't want to be in there."

TD: That's right, okay, okay.

JW: But when Looker came to me and said, "You're probably going in, we're probably going in," I thought, "Okay, this is what we're supposed to do. This is what we trained for." So it was, I don't know, maybe an hour later, he came up to me and said, "It's definite." He said, "We're going in. Landing barges will come aside. They will make an announcement pretty quick." Well, he had hardly finished that they made the announcement, "Prepare to go ashore. Gather up your gear, and report back to the deck when you're called."

TD: What was your gear? What did you have? What did you carry?

JW: Well, our duffle bags, we didn't have. All we had was our backpack, a blanket roll, a poncho, our rifle. That's what we had. So, I told my platoon, we were called up on deck and I told them, "We're gonna go in, go down and get your backpacks, get all set, get your rifles, check everything out, and report back up here when they call us." And that was probably, I'm gonna guess 6 or 7 o'clock at night, they called us up and they said, "The landing craft are aside now." They gave us the order of loading. [...] When I got on the U.S.S. Artemis, back at Maui, and Dick South was the radio tech on board, we of course got together immediately. And they had just left the States. The Artemis, I don't know where they had been but they just came back from the States and they were at Maui to pick us up. And, Dick said, "I have two bottles of whiskey." And he said, "We'll nurse one along now, and we'll save the last one for when we find out wherever you're going." So we did that.

While we were on our way to Iwo, we'd have our occasional drink out of the bottle. It was probably Four Roses or [Seagrams], I don't know what it was. But, anyhow, when we got the word from Looker that we were going ashore, I told Dick, I said, "Where's that bottle?" So I got all my stuff, and, in fact, my stuff was probably in Dick's radio shack, and so I had everything in order, checked everything out. He brought out the bottle and he and I had a drink, and Rod came in and we gave Rod a drink. He didn't drink but he drank that one. And, I don't know how much, I don't think we finished the bottle. I hope not because it wasn't too long after that they told us to start boarding. And, prior to that, I was standing at the railing, it was, I guess after Looker told [us] we

were going in, but I was standing at the railing just thinking. I wasn't even looking at the island, I was looking out where I could see and everything was going out there. And I just thought about all that had gone on, and might happen and all this. One of my guys came up and stood beside me. He was a buck private. And he started talking. He started talking nonsense. I thought, "Oh, shit." He was telling me how he was gonna do this thing all by himself, and if they get him in there, he'll do the whole thing. I don't have to worry. And I realized this guy was flipped, you know.

So, I told Rod and D. E. about it. Frankly there were two other guys that [...] I didn't know about, but they knew weren't a good risk to have with you. So, when we lined up on deck to do our final roll call before we boarded the landing craft, the captain asks you for your report. You have to report, "My platoon is all present or accounted for." And I made that reply because D. E. looked at me and just kind of shook his head. I found out later, they had taken the guy that had been talking to me and two other guys, and they strapped them to bunks down in the hold. Because they didn't want to be with them; they didn't want them going in. They were found, eventually, because they weren't strapped that tight. But, anyhow, when I looked at D. E. and knew, he did something. So, I dutifully gave my report, "all present or accounted for."

TD: So, D. E. and Rod restrained these guys so they wouldn't join you?

JW: Yeah. They had somebody else – I know D. E. tied the one guy to his bunk. I know that D. E. did that. And, that's what they had to do, because you don't need somebody like that. Everybody else was just scared to death, that's the way it was. So, anyhow, they eventually told us to start boarding the landing craft. And that's a task in itself. [...] I guess I had maybe two drinks, I don't know, maybe more, but I don't think. And you have that pack that probably weighs, I don't know, 50 pounds, and you've got your rifle and all this stuff going on. And you're trying to climb down this rope ladder. And they always had you practice climbing down a rope ladder. But it's more difficult to do when one, you're scared to death; and two the ship's moving one way and the small boat's moving another way. And this guy's down in the small boat yelling, "Get your ass down here, come on! Come on, we gotta go!" So we all eventually got into the small boat. I think it was what they called an LTM, maybe, something like that. There were to platoons of us in that boat.

So, we started heading for shore. Now, it's probably 11 o'clock at night, pitch dark, except they had lights on the beach. They had that well-lit because they had to know what was going on on that beach. We could see that even from the ship, that that was lit in there. So, anyhow, we left the mooring of the ship and started in towards the island. And, I thought, "We're going in circles." [...] I realized we were making big circles. I didn't know what was going on, and I went back and I talked to the coxswain who was, he was the driver of this landing craft. I asked what was going on, and he said,

“Just follow orders.” And I thought, “I’m not gonna find out anything here.” That went on for a while. [...] But he eventually called me back, and he said, “We can’t get in because the beach is too cluttered.” He said, “We’re gonna float around here all night. You’re here for the night.” So, if you can imagine a landing craft filled with guys who don’t want to be there, and most of them are seasick, they haven’t gone to the john in six hours. It’s not a very nice place to be. We floated around, and at daylight, he got clearance to take us in. He got word that we were not gonna get any fire at the beach. Because they had cleared that out. Somehow they wanted us to know that we could land safely. Well he couldn’t get close enough because there was so much junk in the water, he couldn’t get close enough. I think when we got out, we were knee-deep or less in water, so it was no problem to get in there. And we had a greeting party. I don’t know how they assign these people. But, some Marine met us there and he directed us where we were to go, a spot on the beach. It was probably 25 yards off the surf. That was to be where the 24<sup>th</sup> replacement set up camp.

Now when you talk about setting up camp, when you get into Iwo, the beach was inclined. But, 75 yards beyond that, it started up pretty steep. We were at the base of that, where we were holed up. And I knew that it’s not good to stay in one group talking about things. We had to get separated, but we had to stay in touch with each other. So, somehow, with little communication, you get everybody spread out. And I was in touch with Rod and D. E. It was then, probably early day, 10 o’clock, something like that. And a runner came down to us. They had come earlier, they wanted anybody that was a machine gunner. And they pulled a couple guys who, that was their training, they were machine gunners. They pulled them out and took them up. Another time they came down and they were looking for flame throwers. Two guys in my platoon had been trained as flame throwers. So, they left. Eventually some guy came up to the group and said, “I’m looking for Sergeant Watson.” And, I said, “Here.” He said, “The captain wants to see you.” I thought, “Okay, that’s good.” So, he took me back to where the command post was, and that’s when I found out that they had lost a lot of leadership. Sergeants. And they need sergeants. And Looker was there, and he said, “Lieutenant Looker has suggested that you might be able to do good job at that.” And I kind of looked at Looker, and he just nodded his head. I said, “Well, I think I can do a job.” So, they said, “We need to take a squad up there and pass through and relieve the people that are up there right now.” I said, “Where’s up there?” They broke out a map and showed me. It was almost at the end of airfield number 1. They said, “You’ve gotta go up there and relieve that group. You won’t be up there overnight, we’ll get someone to relieve you, but you have to go up and pass through and relieve them.” So, we were able to do that. I had a runner with me who had just come back from that site, so he knew exactly where we were going. They had shown me on the maps. But he took me to exactly where they were supposed to be. And we did what they call a “pass [field?].” The squad that had been there just started drifting back and then they went back to the back lines. He had told me



that we would be relieved before the night. It's getting dark, and I'm thinking, "Hell, we're here for the night." But we weren't, they got somebody up to relieve us. I was glad because this was my first combat experience. And I wasn't too sure that I was doing everything right. But I had that ability to make sure people – I guess they trusted me. If I said, "Let's go over here," they'd go over there.

TD: When was the first time you saw the enemy?

JW: That first night. The first night. Because the people that we relieved, there was a PFC in charge of the whole thing, and he told me that there was a cave. I could see it. He said, "They're in there. That's where they are." And he said, "We can't move because they fire as soon as we start to move." And I said, "Well, how are you gonna move back?" Because they didn't fire on us when we were coming up, which surprised me. They let us get there. He said, "We'll go very carefully." And I said, "Please do." So, as I was looking, I could actually see Japanese in that cave. But, I didn't want to throw a grenade, because I only had six grenades with me. And I didn't want to fire because I didn't want to tell them where I was." With inexperience, the best thing to do is just stay on your belly and stay down.

TD: You were all on your bellies.

JW: Yeah we were all on our bellies, yeah.

TD: How far was the cave? It sounds like not that far.

JW: Oh no, 25 yards. 25 yards. That's why I said grenades because I could have thrown a grenade that far. But I didn't want to because I didn't know how many I might need. So anyhow, that night came back and I saw Looker, and I asked what the hell he got me into. He said, "But you're gonna have to go back." And I said, "I'll be okay with that." The longer you were there, the scared-er you got, but I guess the more experience you had, too. I guess they go hand-in-hand.

[...] [As] Sergeant, I had 3 chevrons. Well, we never wore those. Officers never wore bars, anything like that. You just knew from what you did. Now there was a way to tell because on all of our equipment and everything else, there was a symbol that indicated the 4<sup>th</sup> Division, and there was something else that indicated the 24<sup>th</sup> regiment. And, inside that, was a number. And a "3" indicated a sergeant. So, I had a three on mine. But the only one who could see that were the people next to me. So, you were kind of known by what you did. Guys that didn't have rank did a lot of things that they had to do. There were, maybe, more privates and PFCs that led attacks on Iwo than sergeants. Because there weren't that many sergeants. Sergeants were fair game. That's why I think of how I'm still here.

There was another site we had to get to. I looked at it on the map, and I don't know who I said it to, Looker or somebody, and I said, "Is that a cliff there?" They said, "Yeah," and I said, "We're gonna be on top of a cliff?" And they said, "Yeah." Because when you look at a map of Iwo Jima, you can see that the beaches where we landed and at the end of the beach where the 4<sup>th</sup> Division landed, instead of being level there was this cliff there. And we were to go up on that cliff. So, that was my second assignment. This time I took a whole squad up there. There hadn't been much action over there but they knew they had to get through there. Aside from Suribachi, which was the highest point on the island, there was what they called "Hill 382," because it was 382 feet high. That was kind of between the airfield and this damn cliff over here. That was probably one of the tougher fights that the 4<sup>th</sup> Division, had, getting beyond 382. I had this squad over to the right of that at the top of this cliff. They said that they would send relief for us while it was still daylight, because we couldn't be there at night, because the Japanese knew that territory. I had no idea really how far away this cliff was or even how high it was. I just knew there was a cliff. And I didn't want guys over there falling off a cliff. So, they did relieve us and took us back. I actually stayed back for, I think, a day.

JW: By this time, the 24<sup>th</sup> replacement had virtually been dismantled. I had gone one way, they had taken guys to do this. That unit didn't exist anymore because we had all started to integrate into the 24<sup>th</sup> regiment. But everybody was in the same boat, everybody was scared to hell.

TD: Were you under fire?

JW: Oh, yes. That second day when we went up and 382 was over here, we were probably 50 yards away from that. As soon as we started up the hill, we got far from the top of the hill, and we had to just stay. We all got flat. I think of it now, it's funny. There was a clump of bushes, and I told some guys, "Get down behind the bush." I don't know what that was gonna do for them, but they did. It's amazing, because now, you think, "That wasn't very smart," but at the time it looked like a pretty good place to hide. So, I had some guys over there, and we were trying to determine where the fire was coming from. I sent one guy around to the left, because there was a little gully that he could sneak up through, and I asked him to go over there and see if he could find out where the fire was coming from. And about this time, somehow I found a telephone. And telephones then were hard-wired. Guys would run up there with reels of wire, unreel them, to hook this phone up to back there. I found this phone and thought, "Oh, that'd be nice." And, of course it was dead. I picked it up and tried to get through – it was dead. But, that would have been helpful if I had been able to do that. But we identified where the fire was coming from. And we took it out with [emotional pause] some grenades and rifle fire. And it turned out there were just three Japs in there, and we got them all. When we finally got up to where they had been. These guys were so riddled. We really got them good. We were able to make it almost to the top of the hill, and I guess I was brought

back again. Frankly, I remember thinking, "I don't want to go back in." [Chokes up] I didn't want to go back because it wasn't only me, I was taking other guys with me. And I don't know how I got over that, but I did.

TD: Did you lose any guys?

JW: Oh yeah, oh yeah. One guy was right beside me. We were shoulder-to-shoulder. And we were fired on. [Emotional pause] I looked over to him, and half his head was gone. He was right beside me. His head was knocked off, mine wasn't. That's tough.

TD: What was his name?

JW: I don't know. I didn't know then. I don't know. I did find out eventually though, because I found him in the cemetery. I knew that was one grave I had to visit. But anyhow, it was a lot of stuff like that that went on. None of it was very pretty. The smell was terrible because in that sulfuric content of that ash, bodies decayed very rapidly. Marines were pretty quickly picked up. Those guys did a great job. They were unarmed because they had to do things. They cleared that battle site. But not the Japanese. They just stayed there and rotted, and that's what stunk. And so did the Marines. I don't think it took more than a day or two before they started to rot. I don't know if it's a good place to remember or not.

JW: I often thought that wasn't me there. I was a guy telling me what to do. [Emotionally] Because unless somebody told me to do it, I wouldn't have done it. I think most guys would tell you this: you are your own boss in that way. You had to put yourself there. You had to make yourself do it. And the more you saw of it the less you wanted to do it. But, we did it and it took a long time to do it. And it didn't get any easier. You think after you go through one little skirmish the next one is gonna be a little bit easier. But, they're all different, they're all very much different.

You asked me one time, a long time ago, if I hated the Japs or hate them now. And I honestly do not know. I was trained to hate them, and I did and I had reason to. But did I really hate them? I don't know. Today, that's not my nature. [Emotionally] And, maybe it's because I experienced that, I don't want it to be my nature. Now, talking about it is very difficult. And I don't know when I've ever done this this long. I've tried talking with my kids about it and I can't. I said more today than I have ever in talking about Iwo Jima.

JW: But, it'll be interesting for me, the aftermath of this interview. Because I have gone a long, long time without thinking too much about this. Only in a very casual way, almost. I guess I've recalled a lot of things that I didn't ever want to recall. I guess that's the good part of this.

TD: What do you think, if you weren't there, you wouldn't understand very well?

JW: You're scared to death. But you know what you have to do, you have to do in spite of that. So you're scared, so what? Because everybody else is.

TD: You never get un-scared.

JW: No, no.

TD: It never goes away.

JW: No. I never knew anybody that ever said that. "I'm not scared anymore." No. The day I left there I was scared.

TD: I know you were involved in hand-to-hand combat, and that's something that is really hard to imagine. How did that happen?

JW: Not by plan. [...] The caves again, they were hidden in caves. We were up beyond, I mentioned earlier, 382, Hill 382. I was never on Hill 382, I was to the right of that. But I knew what was going on there. [Struggles to speak] I can't. We were going up there, and we passed a Japanese cave that we had passed, I had passed 3 or 4 other times. And we knew by now that there was no one cave, they were all interconnected. We knew that by now. But we walked by this cave, and just beyond it we stopped because we had kind of straggled out and I wanted to get everyone reasonably together. Not into a clump but I just wanted to know where everybody was. And 3 Japs came out of that cave. One had an M-1, which was our rifle. When I saw that, I guess I just flipped. And I tackled him. The others, there were two others, they reacted to that. And my guys, three of them, joined in. We got in a roarin', scuffling, punching, knifing battle, because I couldn't stand the idea that this guy was coming at with me a rifle he took from some of my buddies. I don't know how long we scuffled. [Pause] I eventually just took the butt of my rifle and crushed his head. [Pause] And one of the other Japanese had been killed also, I don't know how. None of our guys were, they were hurt. One had a broken arm, I had a broken nose. But, when that was all over, I thought, "I'll never in my life be the same."

[Emotionally] I just thought, "I'll never even be able to leave this spot." I started to stand up and got almost to my feet, and then I realized there was somebody behind me. And I knew it wasn't good because I knew it wasn't one of my men. And I turned around and I was eye-to-eye with a Japanese soldier. I was looking down at him because I was taller than he was. But it was the most unusual thing because he and I met eye-to-eye, never said a word. Whether he had been part of that little scuffle, I don't even know. But we looked at each other and some message went through us, between us, and we both turned around and walked away. I often wonder what, if he's alive, what his version of that story would be. [Very emotional] Never know. But for me, I've said this before, if I ever saw that man again, I would know him. And I think he would know me. At that time, you had to get over that stuff, because there was other stuff to do. I guess what I just told you didn't really settle into me, with me, until after we had been pulled off the line

and we were just doing nothing. That's why I had the chance to walk back to the cemetery. I thought about that. I thought, "I gotta leave that here."

TD: Leave what there?

JW: That thought. I couldn't do that.

TD: Why?

JW: Well, I couldn't forget that. I couldn't just leave that whole incident there, which was what I wanted to do. I just wanted to leave that whole incident on Iwo Jima. I didn't want to bring it off Iwo.

TD: Why not?

JW: It's too horrible. Just to think that we'd always been physically close to the enemy. But that's about as close as you can get.

TD: Obviously, the combat part of it is a horrible thing, but is the you, looking face-to-face with the enemy and turning around, a horrible thing?

JW: No. No. For me, I think that's the salvation in remembering it.

TD: It's a beautiful story.

JW: Yeah? No, for me, that's the good part about remembering it. And it's one of those things that I will never know the outcome. I know what it was for me, I survived. I doubt if he did because there weren't many survivors of Japanese soldiers. So, my assumption is he did not survive, but he survived that day, that hour, that time.

JW: Well we always had – I always had, I think we all – had our bayonet mounted. We were never without the bayonet at the end of the rifle. And I carried an M-1 all the time. I could have had a carbine, I could have had a .45. I thought, "I don't want a .45, what would I do with that?" But I always liked the M-1, I carried an M-1 with me all the time. I killed two guys with the bayonet. One was coming right at me. And I tried with the butt, well I guess I missed him, I don't know. But he just kept coming at me. And this was probably from 10 feet away when he started. I don't know. He started coming, and he had a knife. He didn't have a rifle. I came at me with the knife. And I just took the bayonet and went right into his chest. And when he went down I couldn't get the bayonet out. [Tearfully] So I shot him. I shot him and I got my bayonet back. I killed another man – I often thought about that, I'm not sure that I killed this man, but I sure disfigured him, with that same bayonet. And, when we were getting ready to leave Iwo, we were told we were going back to Maui. We were sitting down on the beach, we were just waiting for small boats to come in and pick us up and take us out to troop transports that were out there. We were sitting there just talking and horsing around. And I looked at my bayonet and it was pretty cruddy. To clean it, I just took it and I jammed it down into the ground.

And I thought, I don't want it anymore. So I just left it there. Because there were other bayonets. There was equipment, at that point, all over the place. Ammunition, rifles, whatever you needed was there. There was a bayonet nearby, in a scabbard. I took it out of the scabbard, put it in my scabbard, and that's what I brought home.

I took a walk down toward Suribachi because I wanted to visit the cemetery again. There were three cemeteries; the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> Divisions all had separate cemeteries down near Suribachi. I remember the first time I went down there. There weren't even any crosses yet. There were markers of some kind. When I went back there were white wooden crosses. So I went down there because I wanted to visit a couple of graves. Which I did. And when I was coming back, I saw a group of guys. It looked like a craps game to tell you the truth. And I asked them what they were doing. They said, "We're taking hand grenades apart." [I thought,] "Okay, that's alright." I said, "For what?" and they said, "Oh we just want to have a souvenir." And I watched them. I guess I asked them to teach me how, I don't know, or they said, "Do you want to learn?" I said, "Yeah," so they walked me through taking one hand grenade apart. But they said, "But if you're gonna do this, you've got to get your own hand grenades." They had a case of grenades sitting there. So, there was a cave not too far away from there that we knew had been one of their ammo storages. So I picked up a whole case of Japanese hand grenades and brought it back to this group and I put it down. I took it out and I said, "I think I better watch one more time," so I watched one of them take one of these hand grenades apart again. I said, "I can do it." So this one guy helped me – walked me through it. But he wouldn't touch it, he said, "You gotta do the whole thing."

So the first thing you had to do was put your finger on top of the grenade to make sure you held down the cap because it was spring loaded. As soon as you pulled the pin, this cap, this cover came out of there, and that activated the grenade. The gunpowder itself was in the body of the grenade. And the body of the grenade was all scored so that when it blasted there was fragments all over the place. So what you had to do was put your finger on top of this thing, hold it down, and then pull the pin out. Now, you have a live hand grenade in your hand. And you don't know too much about it and there's not too many places to throw the damn thing. The next thing you had to do was take the body of the grenade, and start to rotate it. Because the top and the body of the grenade were screwed together. And it took forever. It took 3 weeks, I think, to unscrew that thing. And you got it out. Now inside that, was the gunpowder that exploded the thing, and the cap that really set off the explosion. It was in a little copper tube that stuck down in there. You had to take that out and very carefully set it aside. You probably could have thrown it away, but they told me you had to explode that cap into a gasoline can. An empty gasoline can. You're still holding this thing together. So, I emptied the gun powder out, and just scattered it to the wind, and I thought, "I don't have to hold this anymore, because I've already taken the cap out." I just put that down. And then you scooped into

the beach, and you scooped up the volcanic ash, the “sands of Iwo Jima” as John Wayne called it. We put that in there and screwed this thing back together, put the pin back in.

Now we had a Japanese hand grenade that was perfectly safe that was filled with volcanic ash, and nothing more. I did three of them. How foolish can you get? So anyhow, we’re getting these things all done. Pretty soon the captain came along, and he said, “What are you guys doing?” Well, we explained, “They just taught me how to take a hand grenade apart.” Which didn’t make much sense to him because he said, “You know, that’s a court martial offense?” And he said, “You go to the brig,” and that whole routine. And he said, “Unless you make one for me. Then I’ll forget I ever saw you.” We said, “Yes.” And in fact, one of the other guys says, “Here mine’s already made, take this one.” So he gave him a grenade that, I guess it had ash in it, I don’t know. He gave it [to the captain], the captain walked away. I figured, that’s enough, I don’t need any more of this. How long can you be foolish? I brought 3 of those back with me. I have one now. What happened to the other two, I have no idea.

TD: After the war, did you have any problems with nightmares, and cars backfiring, or?

JW: Oh I’m still like that. Loud noises today set me off. Not set me off, I mean I react. Any loud noise, I react to immediately. I mean not, you know –

TD: Right.

JW: It just scares me, it scares the hell out of me.

TD: Was it worse in the 1940s and 50s, or did it get better? How does that work?

JW: No, no, no it’s better today.

TD: Better today.

JW: Yeah.

TD: But you did have problems after the war?

JW: Yeah. I remember, well I don’t remember a lot of this but Helen will tell me, right after we were first married, I used to yell and toss and turn in our bed. As a matter of fact, not too long ago, in the last 3 years, something like that. I had some minor surgery. And, of course, I was under for the surgery. And Helen and my daughter Susan were with me in the recovery room as I was coming out of the anesthetic. And I think what I started to do was shake my head. And then it got more violent. And they said to me, “What’s going on?” They asked me, “Are you having recall of something?” And I said, “Yeah.” It was something I forgot completely about. And I told them the story that on Iwo one day, we had been on the line, we were coming back, and we got caught in a trap. We thought we were home free and we found out there were Japanese in front of us and to our left. And we couldn’t see where they were, but we could hear their fire. They weren’t firing at us,

they were firing someplace else, but we knew they were close enough. I knew we couldn't move until we found out where they were and what they were up to. And there was one problem: 5 of us were out of ammunition. We didn't have any ammunition. One guy said, just back where we came from, there was a stash of ammo back there. He said, "I'll go back and get some ammo and bring it up." But to do that we were kind of behind a minor hill and some bushes. Then there was a clearing and a kind of path that led to where the ammo was that he knew about. So he said he'd go get it. There was Japanese someplace up here to our left, we knew that, but we didn't know exactly where. So he and another guy went back to get this ammo. Now they ran like hell across the clearing because they knew they were open. And then they were okay because the Japs didn't have a sight on them when they were back in there. They got to this place where the ammo was, and they picked up a lot of ammo and they were bringing it back. In the meantime, I had been able to spot the Japanese in the cave up on the hill. And I knew that they spotted Rod Watt, I knew they spotted him running across there. They had their rifles right at that point. So as soon as he came back, the two of them, they were gonna open fire as they came across that clearing. I didn't want to yell that them – I could see them coming, they were approaching this clearing – and I didn't want to yell that them, so I just did this [shakes head dramatically] I just shake my head, "No. Don't come." Either they didn't understand, didn't pay attention, or old Rod thought, "The hell with you." But anyhow, they made a dash for it. Rod made it okay, the other guy got hit. And I went out and actually dragged him in. Because they had opened up. Well, now we knew where they were. Now that these guys were back there, we cleared out that cave. I, officially, had no access to it, but there was a flame thrower nearby, and I called him and I said, "In that cave." So he laid a blast into that cave and cleared them out. That's why when I woke up from that anesthetic, I was doing this [shakes head] because I had reflected back to that. So I told them that story, and I had forgotten completely about it.

TD: Did the man who was wounded survive?

JW: Oh yeah, yeah.

JW: When you were brought off the line, hell, you were still on the line. Until late in the battle. But even late on, when we were up at the Northern part of the island – I never did get up to the end of that island. I didn't want to go up there. But that was pretty well secure. Even with that, and even months after, they were finding guys in those caves.

[End Tape]

[End Interview]