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Narrator

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Freeport Armory  
25 May 2001

WC: Mr. Castronovo, please tell us about where and when you were born.

FC: I was born November 29<sup>th</sup>, 1918 in Bronx, New York.

WC: Tell us about your family, your Mother and Father.

FC: Well I can't tell you about my Father because, as you might have read about, at that time in 1918 there was an epidemic going around called the Spanish Influenza. My Mom told me people were dying like flies. They couldn't bury them fast enough. People were lying on the sidewalk waiting to be buried. That's how bad it was. My Father died eight days after I was born. My Mother said he got to touch my fingers as a baby. That's the only thing I know about him. But my Mom, she was the greatest person in the world. She raised six kids without a husband after that.

In 1929 the stock market fell and I was about ten years old. I grew up during the Depression, from 1929 until 1940 when I went into the Army. People were helping one another. We helped one another. We had nothing, but whatever we had, we shared. It wasn't like today with the drugs and everything. It was about helping one another. If you had a dime you were lucky. If you had a quarter you were rich. If you had a dollar you could yell it out and do whatever you wanted. A Coca cola was a nickel, White Castle (burgers) was six for a quarter, and all that kind of stuff. It was beautiful. The milk wagon came around and you'd steal a bottle of milk if you could get it (chuckle). It was really nice as we helped one another and stuck together. I remember going shopping with my Mother and for ten dollars we had three full bags of food, meat and everything. I think we ate better then than we do today.

So 1939 came and my Mother got cancer and a year later I lost her and she was the best part of my life. She was a great mom. What she did, women today should know. There were no refrigerators, no washing machines, no laundromats. Everything my Mom did was by hand on the tub. She kept us clean as a whistle. She cooked, cleaned and fed us kids. Anyway, there was nothing around and I was 19, almost 20. My brothers were all married and one of my brothers was living in Pennsylvania. My brother Al took me to Pennsylvania and put me to work in a factory just to make a few dollars, but I didn't like it. Also, he had two children (my niece and nephew) and I felt I was in the way. So I said I wanted to enlist in the Army because I will never get this opportunity again to travel. I wanted to travel and see what the

rest of the world was about. I did the right thing and I'm glad I did it. I'm not sorry.

I enlisted in the Army July 11, 1940. When I enlisted they asked me where I wanted to go. The choices were Hawaii, Panama or the Philippines. Well I remembered all about the hula girls so I said I'll take Hawaii. I'm glad I did because of what happened in the Philippines and we went through the Panama Canal going to Hawaii and it was terrible there.

I first went to Fort Slocum in New York City. I stayed there until they were ready to ship us to California. While I was there, waiting for the ship to come in, they sent us to Camp Drum, NY, way up next to the Canadian border, on maneuvers.

Our ship finally came in and took us to California. We got to California and spent a couple months there, waiting for our ship to take us to Hawaii. When we arrived we had to stop at Alcatraz Island, where we helped unload supplies. Eventually our ship came in and we were able to sail for Hawaii. This is me waiting to ship out for Hawaii (shows photo).

In Hawaii I went through basic training and I was there from November, 1940 until they hit us in December, 1941. If I'd had another six months I'd have been sent back to the States, as my two years would have been up. Then they bombed us and that was the end of that.

It was December 7, 1941. It was a beautiful morning. Where I slept in the (Schofield) barracks was near the kitchen and I could smell the bacon, pancakes, sausage, and coffee, etc. On Sundays you could sleep all day if you wanted to, but not me. I wasn't missing breakfast. That was the best meal of the day. I jumped up, grabbed my toilet articles, and headed up to the third floor to take a shower.

Just as I was about to shower I heard this roar of planes coming over. It kept getting louder and louder, and closer and closer. All of a sudden it was right on me. I dropped everything and ran to the window. At that time the Schofield Barracks was like an island. There were no other buildings, no roads, no nothing. About a mile or two away was Wheeler Field and that's where the first bombs were dropped. They hit Wheeler Field. They hit the planes and the hangers. The Air Force men were running every which way, trying to get to the planes, trying to get out of the way, etc. because you couldn't just stay there. From there they went right into Pearl Harbor and dropped bombs. Then the next wave came over (I think they were four abreast), and the next wave and the next wave. For I don't know how long, a half hour or three quarters of an hour, it went from a beautiful morning to nothing but smoke, flames, explosions, sirens.

And the worst part of it was those gallant Navy men. The courage they had, they didn't have time to put their shoes on. They tried to get up on deck to man the guns. But it was too late, though they tried anyway. And it happened at five minutes to eight. I got up at ten to eight and in five minutes it all happened. Guys were getting ready to go enjoy the day playing golf or tennis, picnic, etc. Some were getting ready to go to eight o'clock mass. That's when they hit. Many weren't just killed, they were murdered in their sleep. That's how I address it. It was cold blooded murder and I shall never forget it. We survivors will never forget it. It was a dirty sneak attack.

After that was cleaned up some the next day the artillery was sent to positions and the coast artillery was set up in their positions, etc. The rest of us, the 19<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> infantry, had the job of stringing barbed wire along the beaches from one end to the other. It took us a couple months. We expected the Japanese to invade us. If they had come back to invade us they would have had a good shot at us. We just had a peacetime Army and we didn't have all the weapons we needed. Anyway, maybe every one hundred feet we had machine gun positions. I had mine and then the next, and on and on all over the

island. We expected invasion but that never happened. After we secured the island they shipped new troops to the (Hawaiian) islands and we were sent on to other islands. Some went to Bougainville, some to New Caledonia, Guadalcanal, New Hebrides, etc. My outfit ended up in Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands. It took us 23 days to get there from Hawaii because every eight minutes we had to change course because of submarines.

So we got to Guadalcanal and there we had our hands full with the Japanese. They were positioned, ready, willing, and waiting for us. In those jungles you don't see anything. You just hope you are throwing grenades where they are supposed to be. Almost nothing was hand-to-hand. They had snipers tied in the trees. You had to be in their line of sight before they could fire. It was very still in the jungle so we watched for anything that moved. We would hear voices and when we did, we threw grenades or fired mortars. We also had BAR's and flame throwers. We weren't trained for jungle warfare. In Hawaii we were trained for open warfare, not jungle warfare. We learned the hard way. When we got there it was do or die. The Japanese were seasoned troops and knew how to handle it. But I am proud of us Americans. It didn't take us long to learn how to fight in the jungle. We had the Fiji natives who came to help us out. We didn't call them mountains, we called them hills. We were on hill 27. Every night it rained up in those hills and it ran down the hills. It took us a day to get from the bottom to the top. Half of the guys couldn't make it because they had full field packs, ammunition belts and rifles and you had to crawl on your stomach. The Fiji natives led us and showed us how to get to the top. We finally got to the top and continued into the jungle. It took us between five and seven months to secure the island. My company lost 7 to 10 men killed and 18 to 25 wounded. Three of my buddies, Nick, Denman and Reynolds were machine gunned right next to me. I was the target because Nick asked me to go down and fill our canteens and bring up more grenades. I said ok and as I got up they (Japanese) sprayed them. Don't ask me how I didn't get hit because I don't know. To this day I still don't know, but they got machine gunned and they all died. When I came home I went to visit a couple of the parents because I knew where they lived. So we went on and secured the island.

I held up pretty well because I was healthy. I lived with the natives, who loved us and hated the Japanese, who took their food and raped their women. With one of the natives I used to go "shopping". By that I mean finding the local fresh fruits, vegetables and fish. So I was getting a lot of vitamins and held up longer than a lot of others. Then finally I got malaria very bad. I was in bed with about five blankets over me, a high fever, and shaking like a leaf. My mind was not affected but my whole body was shaking like a leaf. They eventually flew me to a hospital in New Hebrides. That was much better than what we had at Guadalcanal.

At New Hebrides, Mrs. Roosevelt came to visit the troops. We had lunch with her and I sat right across the way from her. She interviewed me and she was a pleasure to talk to. She had a great sense of humor. She asked what she could do for me, like mail some letter, etc. I said if she could put me in an envelope I could go with her.

From New Hebrides they sent me to a better hospital in Auckland, New Zealand. I was there for a couple of months. It was a beautiful country. They finally had to send me back to the U.S. to try to cure my malaria. I was sent to the Kennedy Hospital in Memphis, TN. There they asked for volunteers for a malaria study and I volunteered. They drew blood every day for testing and I was there for seven months. The reason I did that was that it relieved me from duty. I gave blood each day and was then free to go. From there they sent me to North Carolina. I don't remember how long I was there. They

finally decided to discharge me so they sent me back to Camp Upton in New York. I was discharged and came back home.

WC: When was that?

FC: That was December 12, 1944. I had almost five years in. It was a great experience, a powerful experience, and one that I will never forget. I'm 82 now and I could still tell you what happened. I like to give speeches. I have given a couple speeches to the American Legion and to schools to enlighten them. I wanted them to know not what I did but what they (who died) did. I want the world to never forget, especially the newer generations, what all of those soldiers, sailors, and marines did in places like Iwo Jima, etc. We risked and sacrificed our lives so that we could all be here today in this beautiful country of ours.

WC: Tell me what happened after the war.

FC: First, a couple months before I was discharged I married my sweetheart who I had met on the beach in 1939. We kept in touch and fell in love through the mail. We were just kids when we met. I was 19 and she was 16.

My first job after I was discharged was working for the Port Authority of New York at the Holland Tunnel. I did that for about two years. But there wasn't much money in that and we were raising a family. I left that and went to work in construction for about 30 years.

Thank goodness for the GI Bill. With that you had a choice of going to college or buying a home. Having a family, I bought a home. We have that home today and I appreciate that. I still get a small pension since I was discharged and we've been in that home for over 50 years. I appreciate what the government did for us. Without them I would never have been able to buy a home.

WC: Is that how you ended up on Long Island?

FC: Yes, my wife's brother knew someone in real estate on Long Island who was selling these homes for the GI Bill. He suggested we look into it. So he took me out to Elmont to see the realtor. He showed us a home and we took it. All we needed was \$800. I had \$500 and a couple of my brothers loaned me the rest and we put the \$800 down and bought the home and I was happy. The home cost \$11,000 then. It is worth probably \$150,000 today.

WC: Did you decide on Elmont right away?

FC: No, that was the country out there. We were moving to the country. There was nothing out there back then. I told my wife I was going to go hunting for small game. It was all woods around us. Pretty soon there were bulldozers and fast development.

WC: How did it feel for a city boy to live out there?

FC: It felt great. I went from the bottom to the top. We adjusted to it and enjoyed it. We had a wonderful family. We had six children, three boys and three girls. They are all out there now of course, though I lost one boy six years ago. I've had a wonderful life and now I'm enjoying my golden years.

WC: When you first moved in were most of your neighbors veterans?

FC: No. On my block there were only two of us who were veterans. In the rest of the town there were plenty more. I have belonged to the American Legion for twelve years now. I belong to the Pearl Harbor Survivors and we meet every month. I keep in touch with everybody. And I have made the speeches to school children and they were great. They surprised me. They would ask questions and I had to have the answers. They were sixth graders and asked great questions. When I talked about the natives they asked how I could talk to the natives because they didn't speak English? I told them about Guadalcanal being controlled by England and how the English would send natives to school in England where they would learn the language. They spoke better than I did. You had to be on the alert. It was a great experience. I have never talked much about the war but when asked a question I have answered. But when I talk to these younger people I want them to know what those men did, losing their lives for their country. I always speak for them.

WC: Tell us about your children.

FC: One was a cop in New York City and he is retired now. One was a fireman in Arizona but he died when he was 49. My daughters are married and my youngest son is a mechanic for New York City.

WC: What can you tell us about how Elmont has changed over the years?

KC: Oh, it has changed a lot. The people have changed. A lot of them are nice. I have nice people on my block. Some are from Jamaica. A next door neighbor is from Pakistan. In spite of the changes I still love it there and I am not about to move.

WC: Tell us about the photograph you have.

FC: This is from the local newspaper a few years ago (shows page entitled "A Salute to Veterans"). This is my picture and the speech I made.

WC: Can you read it?

FC: "Frank Castronovo of Elmont is a Pearl Harbor survivor and a veteran of Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands. He enlisted in the Army July 11<sup>th</sup>, 1940 and was discharged December 12<sup>th</sup>, 1944. His words say it best: I shall never forget December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941 when the Japanese sneak attacked Pearl Harbor at five minutes to eight in the morning. Those gallant men on those ships never had a chance to defend themselves. I will live with this memory for the rest of my life. At Guadalcanal we battled the Japanese until we secured the island. In my company alone, 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry, Company E, we lost nine men and about twenty-eight wounded. I am proud to write this in memory of my comrades."

WC: What other pictures do you have?

FC: This is at Oyster Bay where we Pearl Harbor Survivors meet every December 7<sup>th</sup>, and it was cold there right by the bay. There are only a few of us left. The Elmont Memorial Day parade is coming up and we are the Grand Marshalls at that parade.

WC: What else have you got there?

FC: (shows photo of four soldiers) Here we are on maneuvers before the War. This one (third from left) is me.

OK, let me show you another one here (photo of three soldiers). This is a month or two after Pearl Harbor (attack) when we got our first leave. This is my friend Denman, then Ruggiero, and myself. Denman was later machine-gunned (on Guadalcanal). Ruggiero died of natural causes just recently.

WC: Where was that?

FC: This was in Honolulu. We were on our way to have a little fun.

WC: Can you explain that medal hanging around your neck?

FC: This medal was given to us at the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Pearl Harbor. It was a congressional medal only given to Pearl Harbor survivors. I wear this to every meeting and every parade. It shows Pearl Harbor and has President Roosevelt's famous words: "This day shall live in infamy". I also have medals at home. I have two Battle Stars, for Pearl Harbor and Guadalcanal. I have the Asiatic-Pacific medal, the Good Conduct medal, and others, all in a case hanging on the wall.

WC: Did they give you a Purple Heart?

FC: No. Maybe I should have but I didn't get a Purple Heart. But that's ok. Whatever I have hanging on that wall I am proud of. I did my share and those that didn't come back did more than their share.

(take no. two)

WC: Let's go back to your basic training. You didn't go to a basic training base. You trained with your unit instead. How did that work?

FC: You just learned how to march, how to respect the Flag, how to get up in the morning. The first detail you had was on the "honey wagon", taking care of the garbage. You learned how to use a gun and how to dismantle it and put it back together. You learned how to dress, how to respect officers and how to salute them.

WC: Did you see a distinction between you new recruits and the soldiers who had been there a long time?

FC: We respected them a lot at first but within a month or two you were one of them. As a matter of fact pretty soon I had a buddy here and a buddy there. You are all away from home so you become a family. They were from Pennsylvania, Carolina, Tennessee, New York, etc. But coming from New York you had to be careful (chuckles) because right away you had a bad name.

WC: You got a lot of heat having come from New York?

FC: Oh yes, I did. I must admit it. Some were very nice. But being nineteen year old kids I didn't realize that they would be still fighting the Civil War. I didn't believe in that. I didn't even remember who General Grant or General Lee was. But some of those guys had that imbedded in their minds like I do Pearl Harbor. If you were from New York you were a Yankee. Luckily I was able to handle myself because there was a lot of fighting going on. I said we were all GI's, and a lot of them were my buddies, but there were a few who resented you. We eventually got it sorted out and got along with each other.

WC: Was there much of a distinction between officers and enlisted men?

FC: No, not much. We had good officers and a good Army. I really liked the Army. If it wasn't for the War I might have stayed in there. I liked the training and being active. It was a good life.

WC: Did the sergeants do most of the running of the Company or did the officers get involved?

FC: The sergeants were like our fathers. The officers gave commands to the sergeants and the sergeants controlled us. If we went on maneuvers there would be a 1<sup>st</sup> lieutenant, a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant, and maybe a captain.

WC: Was the peacetime Army before Pearl Harbor much different from the Army after Pearl Harbor?

FC: No, because we were the same group of men all the way through until I was discharged.

WC: So you didn't get a lot of draftees?

FC: No, not at all. We got a few draftees before we left Hawaii because they were building up the companies and we needed more men. They worked out well.

WC: What was Honolulu like before Pearl Harbor?

FC: It was beautiful. You could go to town, have a drink. We only got \$20 a month at that time and a Springfield rifle. From that \$20 they took out for your haircuts and laundry, so there wasn't much left. So with what we had left we would go into Honolulu, if the Navy wasn't in. If the Navy was there we didn't go because they took over the town. It was their time. When we went to town we would have a few drinks and a good meal. We met people and some even invited us to their house. We met a lot of people that way. It was wonderful.

The night before the attack I and two buddies decided to go into town to have a little fun. Then we remembered the Navy was in. There was only one hotel, the Royal Hawaiian, and it was maybe three stories high. It was booked for the weekend. Every place was crowded. You had to fight your way to get a beer. I suggested to the guys that we should just go back to camp. So, we took the bus back to Schofield Barracks about ten o'clock that night. It was a good thing that so many of those Navy guys stayed in town that night. Otherwise there would have been a lot more casualties during the attack. Before the war they told us that we were going to be at war with Japan. They didn't say when or where it would start. They started giving us fixed bayonets and camouflage stuff. We were patrolling in trucks in 4-hour shifts looking for sabotage or anything that shouldn't be there.

WC: They were concerned about sabotage though?

FC: Yes.

WC: Did they tell you why they were concerned about sabotage?

FC: Because they knew we were going to have war with Japan and Hawaii would be one of the first places they would want to take. Once you conquer Hawaii you are on your way to California.

WC: Did anyone talk of fear of sabotage because of all of the Japanese in Hawaii?

FC: They didn't mention anything like that. They just said we were about to go to war with Japan and we were just patrolling the island. They didn't go any further than that. It was just a couple of months until they bombed us.

WC: did they tell you of any particular type of sabotage to look for?

FC: No, not at all.

WC: So you were riding around in a truck with your rifles. What were you looking for?

FC: We were looking for anything that shouldn't be there, like any kind of weapons or positions they were building. We were looking for anything suspicious. But we didn't see anything like that. The Japanese were smart.

WC: What about after the attack? Were there any signs of sabotage or signaling, etc.?

FC: No. After the attack it was a case of positioning ourselves and fortifying the island. It took a couple of months to do that and then they sent in new troops to replace us.

WC: Prior to the attack was life in Honolulu any different from life on the mainland?

FC: Oh yes, it was nice. It was a beautiful climate. We in the military didn't mingle too much with the civilians. We made friends with people here and there but we had to keep our distance and be careful about what we said and who we mingled with. The natives didn't like us too much. There was jealousy about some of their women liking GI's, etc.

WC: Where did you go in Honolulu?

FC: We had a few drinks, we had good dinners and we met people. We played tennis once in a while or went to Waikiki Beach.

WC: The whole tempo or pace of life for the Army must have changed overnight after Pearl Harbor.

FC: After Pearl Harbor there was no more life. It was just go. Everything was in blackout. It was at least a year after that before I saw lights again. On Guadalcanal we couldn't smoke a cigarette. Before dark we had to dig fox holes. There were two men to a fox hole. We were ordered to not move (after dark) no matter what. Anything that moved was the enemy. You couldn't even cough because it would give you

position away. You had to put your face to the ground and cover your head to cough. And it rained every night there.

In the next foxhole a guy heard a noise and he panicked. He threw a grenade, which is what you are supposed to do, but not at night. The grenade flew up, hit a tree limb above them, and fell back into their foxhole. A fellow, George Ferrara(sp?) from California, lost both of his hands and had many shrapnel wounds. They couldn't move him, so the medics came and put a tent over him to treat him. They couldn't move him until morning. They moved him out the next morning and got him to a hospital. I heard later that he survived but lost both hands and part of his leg. It was all because his foxhole buddy panicked and threw that grenade.

WC: Were grenades the preferred way to fight at night?

FC: During the day they were but not at night. At night you used your rifle. The Japanese strategy was to fight at night which was stupid. You can't see in the jungle to begin with so you can imagine what it is like at night. Our strategy was to stay quiet and don't move. If anything moved in front of you, you let 'em have it.

WC: So you used a rifle at night?

FC: Yes. Once when one of them came at us there was just enough light to make him out and one of our guys opened up with a BAR and got him. But nobody moved. At night it was like fighting with your eyes closed. I don't know why they did it.

We kept pushing them back toward Japan. MacArthur returned to the Philippines (where the Japanese had done bad things). It was no wonder that they (Filipinos) hated the Japanese. When I was in Tennessee there were POW camps where the Italian and German prisoners were treated as well as we were treated. We hung around with them, had dinner with them, and treated them like human beings. Not the Japanese. On Bataan they made the Americans march until they dropped dead. They raped and plundered the Philippine people. They were vicious and treacherous. They were good fighters and hard to kill but they were bad.

WC: Going back to Guadalcanal, do you remember what part of the island you were fighting on?

FC: It was all up in the hills in the jungle. The hill we were on was hill 27.

WC: Was hill 27 near Henderson field?

FC: Well it was not far from it. We were in very heavy jungle.

WC: What about artillery and mortars?

FC: We had artillery and mortars. The artillery would blast away to clear the way for us to advance. One day there were two Americans killed out ahead of our position that we couldn't get to. After four days we finally got clearance to move. The sergeant tells me to go up there and get their dog tags. For every guy that died you had to get his dog tag to verify that he was deceased. So I said a Hail Mary and went up there, hoping they were still there. I got up there and, after four days, I don't want to tell you what

that was like. I got their dog tags. There were two dead Japanese and the two guys from our regiment. Then we just kept going day after day. The Air Force would bomb and we would advance, day by day. As a matter of fact, one of our Marines had found a diary on a dead Japanese. It was translated into English and it told the same story about how they were going day by day.

WC: When you say artillery was used to clear the way, you don't mean just the Japanese, do you? You mean it was used to also blow the jungle down, right?

FC: Right, but when we blew down the jungle that kept pushing them back.

WC: How did you know where to call the artillery in when the jungle was so thick?

FC: The Artillery guys knew where we were and we could tell approximately where the Japanese were. Sometimes we could even hear their voices. We also had mortars which were very effective. Another thing was that our weapons were more powerful than what the Japanese had. Our grenades packed 48 steel fragments and exploded like a bomb. Thank God our weapons were more powerful. Even the rifles, if they didn't hit you in a vital spot you could survive. It was the same with their grenades. If one didn't hit you directly you could survive.

WC: Did you ever come under attack from the Japanese knee mortar?

FC: Yes, but like I said, if it wasn't a direct hit you could survive because it didn't have the fragments that our mortar rounds had.

WC: So you had better grenades, etc.

FC: Yes. What we had to fight with was the BAR, which was a beautiful weapon, the flame thrower, grenades, and we had rifles. That was it.

WC: So you didn't have machine guns?

FC: No, we didn't have time to position them. We kept moving and pushing them back. Only one time were we held up for four days.

WC: Did you ever capture any Japanese?

FC: Not me, but some of our outfit captured some. They took them away.

WC: Did you ever find out why the Japanese would not give up?

FC: We found out that they didn't believe in that. They thought it only honorable to die for their country.

WC: How did you feel, fighting against an enemy that won't surrender, when the guys fighting the Germans could drive them to give up?

FC: You don't think. You just do. You're young and gung ho. What I was thinking was that I just wanted to get this over with and get out of there. So you just followed orders and the orders were to just keep going.

WC: Did you ever receive fire from Japanese warships coming down "the slot"?

FC: No because that was when they had the big naval battle. They fought for two days and nights. We were up on the hill and you could see the tracers going all day and night. We won that big battle.

WC: While you were watching all of this naval battle going on did you worry about the Japanese possibly winning that battle and that you may not get off that island?

FC: Since this was not a sneak attack (by the Japanese) we felt that our Navy would beat them.

WC: So you weren't worried about being cut off?

FC: Oh no. but while that was going on the Japanese were landing troops on the other side of the island and we had to go in and get them out of there.

WC: What about aerial bombardment? Did you ever see "washing machine Charlie"?

FC: Every night! Just when we were exhausted and trying to get a couple hours of sleep at night, he would fly over and wake us up.

WC: Why did they call him "washing machine Charlie"?

FC: His plane sounded like a washing machine. Nobody knew where he came from. I remember passing out after four days without sleep.

When I got malaria I was taken down off hill 27 to the Red Cross medical tents. They were marked with red crosses so they would not be bombed. There I was, with a high fever, shaking like a leaf, with five blankets over me and an IV in my arm when a couple Japanese planes came over and dropped bombs on that area. Everybody ran for shelter but there I was, laying there hoping they wouldn't hit my tent. They weren't supposed to do that, but the Japanese did it anyway.

WC: What did you eat when you were there?

FC: We had K-rations but I couldn't stand that. Once we had secured some of the island I met this native. He was a wonderful person and I called him friend. The native men fish at night. They put out their nets and in the morning they pull them in with all the fish. Then they pick whatever fruits and vegetables they have. So I ate what they ate. That's why I survived about seven months before I got malaria. I was getting the vitamins that I needed that I wasn't getting from those rations.

FC: What about insects, etc.?

FC: We didn't have to worry about the snakes or other animals because the bombing took care of them. They were smart enough to disappear. The only bugs we worried about were the malaria bugs.

WC: What about hygiene in the field? How did you keep clean?

FC: Whenever we came across any small lake or a stream we jumped in and cleaned ourselves. We kept clean. To go to the bathroom we had to dig a hole.

WC: Did soldiers really pull gold teeth from dead Japanese?

FC: A lot of guys took souvenirs and yes, I knew of a few who took gold teeth. What I really wanted to get was one of the officer's swords, but I didn't. They were really nice.

WC: Were there any worries about booby traps when taking souvenirs from the dead?

FC: No because I was not interested in taking souvenirs as much as I was anxious to keep moving and get out of there. The only thing I have was given to me by a Marine. This (shows document) is the diary written by one of the Japanese telling about their day-to-day life on Guadalcanal.

(Disc 2)

WC: Going back to Pearl Harbor, some people have said that it was eerily quiet that morning. Did you see it that way?

FC: Not really. It was early Sunday morning when it was always very quiet there. There was nothing suspicious about it. Most were getting up to go enjoy the day off. We used to have lunch with Navy guys. They would come to our barracks or we would be invited to have lunch on their ships.

WC: When you first heard the bombs going off did you think it was a drill or a mistake?

FC: No, not really. When those planes on the field were blowing up all over the place and the hangers blowing up I knew it had to be the Japanese.

WC: Were any of the guys in the barracks thinking that it was some kind of mistake by the Navy or whatever, and couldn't be the Japanese?

FC: No because they had told us that we were going to have war with Japan and that was in our minds. I was surprised and shocked but I knew it had to be the Japanese.

WC: So you could actually see the Japanese pilots' faces?

FC: Absolutely. I was out on the quadrangle outside the barracks, looking up at them. I was using some profanity, seeing one of the pilots smiling and then he opened up with his machine gun and I hit the deck and was falling all over the place. Like a fool I had been just standing there looking up at him. I couldn't shoot at him because I had no ammunition. Our supply sergeant was in town. He was married. We were stuck without any ammunition.

WC: Were you on a balcony of the barracks?

FC: No, I was outside on the quadrangle. Each company, A through G, had its barracks and they surrounded a quadrangle. I was standing there like a dummy looking up at them. I had nothing to shoot at them. Even if I could, what are you going to do with a rifle anyway? These guys are coming over (fast). You would have to be pretty good to hit one of them. Some who had ammunition did try.

WC: What did you do next?

FC: We ran inside because we got the alert call. We all got together and the Sergeant came and the Captain was there. They told us to get ready to ship out. So we grabbed our stuff, lined up, and ready to go to our positions. We went to the beaches. The artillery went up and the headquarters went up and so on. Everybody took up positions. The infantry was on the beaches.

WC: So you got all of your gear and got on trucks.

FC: Yes.

WC: While you were riding on the truck did you see any of the destruction in Pearl Harbor?

FC: Oh yes, but you couldn't see much because of all the smoke. Though it was daytime it looked like night time. There wasn't much to see. When those battleships were hit and went up, it was nothing but flames and black smoke, huge clouds of black smoke. With explosions going off that was all you could see.

WC: From what you saw from the truck did you have any idea how bad it was?

FC: Yes, we knew. There were bodies all over the place.

WC: Did you see civilian casualties?

FC: Oh yes, there were civilian casualties. We heard the ambulances, but our job was to get to the beaches and get to work. The next day we got equipment and materials and we starting building and took our positions right away without the barbed wire. Every hundred feet was a machine gun position. We figured they were coming right back.

WC: The first attack was at 7:55. The second one came at 8:30?

FC: I couldn't tell you the time (of the second one).

WC: Were there planes coming when you were in the trucks going to the beaches?

FC: Oh yes, they just kept coming. But then it died down and you didn't see any more. I don't know just how long it took.

WC: So you are at the beach and the sergeant is telling you where to set up?

FC: Yes, in the machine gun positions.

WC: Did the sergeant tell you what to do if the enemy approached?

FC: Yes, we had to prevent them from landing.

WC: Did they talk about a fallback position?

FC: No.

WC: Was there a feeling that the sergeants knew what they were doing?

FC: They got their heads together pretty quickly. The sergeants and the officers did very good. They positioned us well. I give them credit. They knew what they were doing.

WC: So you and your fellow soldiers, having seen Pearl Harbor, thought that the Japanese could appear at any time?

FC: Oh yes, that's what we all thought. That's why we were on the beaches before the barbed wire. While the men strung barbed wire along the beaches we were there in position.

WC: When you were first set up on the beach and thinking that Japanese landing craft could appear at any minute, were you thinking if that happened you were not prepared and were going to get creamed?

FC: No, I never felt that. I didn't think so much as react to the situation. It was a case of "let's just do it". I wasn't worrying about whether I was going to die. I was afraid, but I just put it out of my mind.

WC: Let's move ahead to that night and the next morning. While there on the beach did you hear any rumors that they were coming around the point, etc.?

FC: No. One of our planes was lost in the dark and crashed near Schofield Barracks. There was a lot of noise still going on (through the night). We didn't know who or what so we waited to see what was going on at dawn.

WC: Anything heard about paratroopers landing?

FC: No. They (Japanese) did their job but they didn't follow through. If they had followed through they would have wiped us out. We had a peacetime army and we didn't have all of the equipment that we needed. We didn't have that many men. We could have held out a few days maybe.

WC: A couple days later you are still on the beach. Were you hearing about Wake Island, etc.?

FC: Not yet. Later on we started to get information about Japanese landings on Wake Island and others. Even when we were on the ship we continued to get information on actions going on. I developed the attitude of "let's just get this over with and go home".

WC: You did some boxing in the Army?

FC: I did a lot of boxing. I was in the golden gloves and an amateur. I fought in Honolulu because I liked it. That was my sport. I could hold my own but I was nothing special. My dream was to go pro after the

Army and get a fight at The (Madison Square) Garden. By the time I got out of the Army I was 25 years old and married, so that was the end of my dream.

WC: The malaria must have also had an impact.

FC: Oh yes, after I got out it took time to build up my health again.

WC: How did your experiences change your life?

FC: Well they made a man out of me. I became a good family man because of my experiences. I was a kid who came from the Bronx and saw what life was all about. The people I met, the things I'd seen, the people I lost. It was a great experience. It really made a man out of me. I grew up overnight. That was it.