

Narrator
Charlie Appleyard

Interviewer
Andrea Clark

Interviewed on February 14, 2009

AC- February 14, 2009 and I'm here with Mr. Charlie Appleyard. May I ask what your birthday is?

CA- Yes. Ah you make me feel old, January, 30, 1927.

AC- What was it like growing up in the thirties? [Laughter]

CA- Well, uhh, the thirties was the Depression and I guess we were pretty fortunate because my father had a job and he worked hard and he progressed so we didn't know it was the Depression. Except some of the neighbors had problems and trouble, they had to move away, you know we didn't go hungry or anything like that.

AC- You were able to stay in the same place growing up?

CA- Yeah. In Yonkers, New York.

AC- New York?

CA- Yes.

AC- Was that where you grew up?

CA- Yes.

AC- Who was in your family? Did you have any brothers or sisters?

CA- I had a younger sister.

AC-Ok. Is that where you graduated from?

CA- Yes.

AC- What got you into the military?

CA- The draft *laughs* Well World War II was popular, it was a nice, no, it wasn't a nice war, it was a *good* war. We had been attacked and we were fighting for our existence, for our lives and everybody wanted to do something. After I got out of high school I still had a few months to go before January. I still had six months to go before the eighteenth, and I thought, "Oh gee maybe I can get in the Navy not the Army." A friend of mine was a month or so older than I was and he

felt the same way, except he wanted to get into the Marines. He was in a different school, different village, but we both had banged up our knees slightly so we had [unclear]. Well the selective services system by 1944 and 45 really had this down to a science, they were taking in people and putting them where they wanted and didn't want enlistments really because nobody wanted the infantry in the Army, so they turned us both down. As it ended up -- it's ironic-- he ended up being drafted into the Marines, which is where he wanted to go in the first place, but I ended up being drafted in the Army.

AC- So they turned you down the first time, but then drafted you?

CA- Oh yes, but by that time the knee was better and I was eighteen and I didn't need parental consent or anything and off I went.

AC- Were those days a long time between the time you went to enlist and the time that they actually drafted you?

CA- Uh, yes, about six months because I got out of high school in June and I was eighteen the following January.

AC- What actually did you do in the military?

CA- What did I do in the military?

AC-Yes, what was your job?

CA- I didn't do very much to win the war if that's what you're wanting. I went in and went to infantry basic training, and that's what they wanted. They wanted infantry men, and so we went to [unclear]. Oh, about four months of basic training, and as soon as you came out of there, it was during this time, of course the war in Europe was over, the V-Day was in May. It became very obvious that, gee, we were going to invade Japan and they were talking about 750,000 to one million casualties. At that time they thought the Japanese were going to fight to the last man, they were sending kamikaze pilots over the sea, so we still had to pay attention. We still had to learn what we were doing here and, of course, then we dropped the bomb, so that was the end of that.

Video Stops

CA- Gee, should we send those guys to occupy, they hate the Japanese, so they start a series of propaganda. They weren't so bad, etc, we got them licked, but I never went. I ended up going, of all places to South America. When you get back you'd appreciate it a little more, get on the computer and go to Guyana.

AC- Isn't that on top of South America?

CA- Oh did you find it? Oh ok, it's on the North East shoulder. Near Trinidad, and I didn't -- why are we going here? I found out that in 1940, the British were in real trouble, their ships being sunk by the U-Boats in the Atlantic.

AC- Oh yeah.

CA- It was very crucial so President Roosevelt, and this is the power of the presidency, Roosevelt said 'Ok we've got fifty eight World War I destroyers sitting around doing nothing, you can have those, but give us bases to protect ourselves. So we got a base in Newfoundland, Bermuda, the Bahamas, a few in Trinidad, one I never heard of was British Guiana, that was the one of the bases we got. I don't remember that! But anyway, there we were, so we got off the boat, and they said, 'Ok, now you're a military policeman. Not an infantryman anymore, you're a military policeman.'

AC-Just like that?

CA- Yes, Yes! So now I'm fighting American Soldiers. No, no. I'm being facetious, we never fought any but that was our job, to maintain order on the base, and in the capitol of Georgetown, so really the only extraordinary, I feel is extraordinary, thing was I met General Dwight D. Eisenhower.

AC- Did you?!

CA- Yes.

AC- Do you want to tell me about that?

CA- Yes that was just my big story. Well first of all, going back a little, when I first told you how we were there, or how the United States was there. They built this base thirty five miles up the river from the capitol because the first thirty five miles of the coastline was pretty much swamp and this is _____ on solid ground, so they built an airfield there. In 1941 or 1942 it was fairly important because we were sending airplanes to the British in Africa and Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery was fighting his way to Egypt and Lybia. Planes would stop and refuel in British Guiana and go into either Brazil across to Dakar, Africa and on up. So for a while it was pretty important, but this nation had a fifty year lease, nice for an old destroyer. Good deal. Anyway, the climate is tropical, it's hot and humid.

AC- Did you still have to wear your whole uniform? Like the pants and everything?

CA- No, I never wore a tie, usually wore the sleeves rolled up a bit, never wore leggings. It was hot and all you would do was sweat!

AC- I imagine that would have been unbearable, in a full uniform.

CA-Oh! Oh yes. Well I'm coming to that too, because we did go through that. There were only 200 men there, tops, all the time we were there. A lot of those were [unclear] being Air Force people flying in and out, and then we had a small group of six of us in the capitol, in Georgetown, that took over an old hotel, because the only way you get from the base into the capitol, thirty five miles, was down the river, there was no road. Well there was a dirt track.

AC- But barely a road.

CA- It wasn't a road. You never used it unless you had to get a vehicle into the capitol. So you went by boat and instead of an overnight pass you got a three day leave. I was there for a while and the climate being hot and tropical it would get up to ninety or ninety two or so and then rain

and rain! I don't think I've ever seen it rain so hard in all the time I've been back in this country. Just pouring down buckets, and the temperature would go down after a half hour, an hour, and the rain would stop and the sun would come out and it'd go up again. We had a rainy season and a dry season, but I could never tell the difference between the two to be honest with you. By this time it is 1946, the war is over and Eisenhower was leaving Europe and coming back to become Chief of Staff. On his way back -- the measure of a man -- he wanted to see and meet some of the places and meet some of the men who had backed up the war in Europe.

AC- That's awesome

CA- In Africa, Brazil, British Guyana, Panama, Trinidad, etc, so he's going to come. It's really a comedy of ours. We had a Lieutenant Colonel In charge of base, and I think he dearly would have loved to be a full colonel, so he decided to call us back from town. Cancels all the leaves, and we were going to become an honor guard for when Eisenhower came down and Eisenhower was going to spend the night there and he was going to stay in the Colonel's house. Another thing I should mention is, with the climate and the rain, everything was built on the second story. Everything was elevated.

AC- Was that for flooding purposes?

CA- Yes, because it rains so much, and damp, and all these insects and everything was built up one. So we went into the warehouse and found some leggings and some helmet liners, these were canvas leggings, and canvas cartridge belts that we wore. What we were really looking for were called Sam Brown belts. They go over your shoulder and down around your waist and they're leather, really great looking, but we couldn't find any. So then we found some Griffin, all white, which used to be used on saddle shoes, --your grandmother probably wore saddle shoes, and you put it on and it makes your shoes nice and white. So we took the Griffin all white and whitened the canvas belts and the canvas leggings and the light steel helmet liners. We didn't look too bad. Except it rained. [Laughter]

AC- So did all the white wash off?

CA- It did, yes! It was a pretty sad looking crew standing up, well, we were all ducked under the shelter before the plane landed, but we got wet, a little bit. He landed and we stood at attention you know. Then we went over to the colonel's house and I was picked to guard the house, and the house was, oh about from here to the next cottage away from the road. It was down through the driveway and there was a cardboard underneath. Did I say the buildings were tall?

AC- Yeah

CA- So there were stairs, you'd go underneath and climb up the stairs and up. So my instructions were to go back and forth standing guard holding my rifle and a pistol, it was ridiculous, but that's the way it was. Just go back and forth and guard his house, he had a few of his staff with him, one was a master sergeant he had a naval aid He had a few more people so they went to the house. So im going back and forth and guess what, it rained [Laughter]. You mentioned before if I had to wear a uniform in that climate, they had raincoats, but if you wore a raincoat you'd be twice as wet on the inside from sweat. It was like an oil skin, so we didn't wear raincoats. I'm

out there getting wet and it wasn't a cold rain, it was warm, but anyway, I got good and soaking wet. So then it stopped and I was still going back and forth and of course the white all started to run down my shirt and my pants and all streaks it was. I was a sad looking sack. So his naval aid came out and beckoned for me to come down and he said "corporal" and I said "yes sir?" Boy last thing I wanted was any problems. He said "the general has said that when it rains you don't need to go back and forth, you can stand under the cardboard." I said "oh thank you very much" Ok back I went, another twenty minutes went by and down came the rain. So I ducked under the cardboard which was right at the foot of the stairs. I'm standing there looking around, and the colonel, I call him the colonel, *my* colonel. The colonel at the base came down and he knew me, "Appleyard!" Gee I could see the color going up in his cheeks "You're supposed to be out there guarding, pacing back and forth!" I said "Sir" I finally got a word out. "the commander told me the general had said I didn't need to stand out there when it rained, I could stand here" He said "you're not in the blankity blank navy, you're in the blankity blank army! Get out there!" Back I went.

AC- Marching in the rain

CA- Yes well I give him credit, about three minutes later, he said "my apologies you were right." He thought I was making up a story apparently.

AC- So you didn't have to stand in the rain?

CA- Well yes, so he said ok so I stood there. The rain was just letting up and they were going to go to the officers club for dinner. So I'm standing there when the driver came up in the car and General Eisenhower comes up the steps. Boy I'm straight as a [unclear] and I'm right at attention. He said "At ease." Ok "good evening Corporal" well there wasn't another corporal within a hundred yards he must be talking to me! I said "yes sir" he wanted to know my name and in the service whenever you gave your name you gave your rank and serial number because this is how you got paid. So whenever they asked your name the whole thing came out.

AC- The whole paragraph?

CA- I answered him and he said "you regular army?" I said "no sir" he said "Well are you going to stay in?" I said "no sir, I plan to go back to college I did a year of college before I came in the service and with the GI Bill I plan to go back" he said "well that's fine, where are you from?" I told him Yonkers. He said "oh yes, just north of New York City?" I said "yes" "Oh wow, good, well best of luck to you in the future" You know I'm saying gee. You've seen pictures, that famous grin?

AC- Yeah

CA- There's the grin

AC- It must have been pretty exciting

CA- It was in a way, I was also a little flabbergasted and that was the end for me I went back to the barracks and dried out. We found out later that another one of our platoon took my place, so I passed the word, you know, walk back and forth like you're supposed to, but if it rains, you can

stand under the cardboard. He said fine. We found out about an hour and a half later that he was back in the barracks. "What are you doing?" "I've been relieved" What happened was they got talking at the officers club we find out and Eisenhower said 'look the war is over you're surrounded on three sides by a jungle and a mile wide river, what's going to happen. What do you have at night? Just leave two men on duty and that's the way you should have it.' So my other buddy whose name was Bailey sent him back, he didn't have any more to do that night or anything else. And he also sent word onto Trinidad and Panama the same general type of claim, you don't need to have an honor guard standing out there in the airport for me. That was the kind of guy he was. So that was that, next morning he took off. There was a sequel, it had nothing to do with the service, but three years later I was back in college, I was going to Columbia University in New York. Guess who they named president? Eisenhower. He was president of Columbia University so he said, he passed the word, anytime that he was touring around the campus he was certainly delighted to stop and talk to student, etc etc.

AC- Sounds like a really humble guy.

CA- Yeah! So when we were walking across the quadrangle and he's coming the other way, in a grey suit and a [unclear] and there's four of us and we said gee. We certainly didn't want to turn tail and run, it'd be too obvious, so we stop and talk to him. This real good friend of mine had ended up on the Pacific, so Eisenhower said "what is your name? Were you in the service?" We were all in the service. "Yeah I was in the Pacific" "oh I don't know too much about that, so where were you?" "Christmas Island" "oh I know less now than I did before, where's Christmas Island?" So he explained to him and another fellow never went overseas, and the third fellow had been wounded in France. In a little crossroads town, and the Germans put up an anti-tank gun and stopped this part of [General George] Patton's army cold, and it was a little insignificant battle that lasted maybe half a day and they blow through, he got wounded there, and he mentioned it. He goes "oh yeah I remember that." Blah blah blah. He told us all the details and how they held up Patton's third army for half a day. You wouldn't think that he would know about little things like that.

AC- All the knowledge.

CA- oh yeah. He said best of luck to you and this and that so he got to me. I said "sir, we met before." "We have. Where?" "British Guyana" "British Guyana?! Oh!" So I told him. He said "oh you were the poor slob that got caught in the rain" I said "yes sir that's me" he said "well a lot of pomp and ceremony is not always necessary." Then he wanted to know a few things about the college, the GI Bill and we went on our way and he went his. And then that same grin.

AC- Sounds like a really great guy.

CA- He was, he was a humble guy. I thought, then, that he was looking out not just for the officers but for the enlisted men, that was my opinion.

AC- How long did you spend in British Guyana?

CA- Just about a year.

AC- When you were there did you contact your family at all, or no?

CA- [Shakes head] Letters. --You've seen third world countries at that time, -- I think British Guyana was like fourth world, except for the capitol. It was really, really primitive, really backwood. Right outside the base was a village and instead of being a story above ground, they were this high off the ground. The capitol of Georgetown at the time, maybe it had 50,000 people and it was spread out, and it was right at the mouth of the Genaro River on the Atlantic Ocean. The main business was taking care of the ships because there was about thirty five foot tide there, almost as the Bay of [unclear]. So the ships would come at the mouth of the river depending on the tide and with all the sediment that was coming down the river, they'd have to stop, then the tide would change and they would go up the river. So they unrolled a lot of stuff right there in Georgetown. The freighters would go right up the river, oh geez, I can't remember how far, to a bauxite mine and they'd haul out the bauxite which eventually became aluminum, so it was valuable. I've often wondered how far they've come in the last sixty years.

AC- Did you ever want to go back?

CA- Yes. Just like two days, just to see what progress they have made, because the only other thing that ever happened there, to my knowledge, was Johnstown. Remember all those people poisoned themselves.

AC- Oh yeah.

CA- Yes that was British Guyana, and that was hacked out of jungle.

AC- So kind of tropical?

CA- It was, and they were very careful about malaria, whatever it took, we took pills and then they sprayed whatever. On the base we were a little better off because it was a little higher and not down on the low lands near the river and the ocean.

AC- So being an American in the 1940s, do you remember when President Franklin D. Roosevelt died?

CA- Oh yes.

AC- How do you think it affected Americans? Do you think they were really upset about it?

CA- Well he died in April, I had gone in the service not that long before, and it was a big letdown, and for most of us at the time he was the only president we ever remembered. He took office in 1933, we were about five or six years old, whatever, so it was a real blow, most of the fellows in basic training either had just turned eighteen or were in their late thirties.

AC- So it was a big gap?

CA- Yes they'd taken all the [unclear] came before hand. Then everybody said, 'Now who?' Truman? Who was Truman? I think Harry wondered who too. That was tough, but I've always admired Harry Truman because he was the one that decided to drop the atomic bomb, and if he hadn't done that, maybe I wouldn't be here. As I said, we were going to invade.

AC- Do you think it was hard for the Americans to put their trust in a new president in the middle of war?

CA- Yes it was, he said to Eleanor Roosevelt, “May God be with you, may God help you,” and she said, “Harry, you’re the one that needs God’s help,” and he did, because he knew nothing.

AC- That’s a big task.

CA- We found out later, of course, that Roosevelt never, I think they had one meeting for lunch one day. Truman didn’t know what was going on, it wasn’t difficult I don’t think, they *wanted* him to succeed and, of course, he kept everybody in the cabinet and the military as is, he made no changes in that at first. So everybody said he was doing alright so far.

AC- How did you feel returning home after being away for so long?

CA- Oh wonderful! It was great! I thought it was just fine. I guess it’s one of those experiences that you wouldn’t miss for a million dollars and you wouldn’t go through it again for two million. I think that was my feeling.

AC- Overall you think it was a good experience, even though you wouldn’t want to go through it again?

CA- Oh yes, because I didn’t get shot at, I wasn’t in any danger, that part was good, because I got in late, there’s been people I know that... have you ever talked to Tom Jones up here?

AC- I haven’t but someone in my class might have.

CA- Yes, boy. Then there’s-- now I can’t think of his name, this happens at our age. I was never good, but now it’s worse-- I consider myself very fortunate because he went over and went through two or three battles and was blinded in Okinawa and you can’t get rid of them. There’s an awful lot of people that had a worse time than I did. [Laughter]

AC- Do you remember where you were when you found out that Pearl Harbor had been bombed?

CA- Yes. Fahnestock state park in Putnam County. A friend of my father’s had gotten tickets to the Giants football game. My mother said, oh gee it’s a nice day let’s take a ride. So we took a ride and had the car radio on. It’s a beautiful state park, nice woods and all. It was two o’clock in the afternoon and over the radio came the news. She slowed down, found a place to turn around and we went home, that’s all she could think of, was going home. We’re going to be safe there, we really weren’t sure where Pearl Harbor was to be honest with you but we had been attacked. So then my father came home early because something was wrong, he didn’t know what, but the loudspeaker kept calling people. I think it was the polo grounds in New York City and they were all generals, colonels, and admirals, over the loudspeaker system. So and so will you please report. He feared something was up he didn’t know what, until after the game.

AC- Do you think that put everyone in a panic?

CA- Oh no. Not a panic. Well first of all we found out that Pearl Harbor was far away. Number two, we couldn't believe how the Japanese got there, that was amazing. Then the third point was that, gee, if they got that far, they might be able to get to California or Oregon or Washington. No, I don't think there was any panic, there might have been on the west coast, but I have no idea. It was just determination.

AC- To retaliate? Or just protect the homeland?

CA- Well determination is a fighting way and Roosevelt gave his speech of "On this day will live in infamy" and then Germany declared war on us the next day and we turned around and declared war on Germany the next day after that. So it was just the fact that boy, we had to buckle down and win. That was the feeling.

AC- Do you watch any war documentaries now or do you feel like they blow things out of proportion and don't really depict what actually happened?

CA- Well there's one. Ken Burns' *The War*.

AC- I've never seen it.

CA- You have to see it. I think if you see that, you'll have as good an understanding of what was going on in the country and what some of the battles were like as anyone. It's remarkably well done and it isn't all blood and guts. It takes three or four different towns and cities in the country and what happened, and a lot of them are with interviews with people like we're having now. It's really well done, some of the rest of it is eh. I look back now, once in a while on the turning movie classics and they'll have an old movie from World War II, some of them are laughable, but if you realize the context in which they were made, and some of the reason for making them was propaganda. Then it's not so bad, but they were, some of them were silly, silly.

AC- Do you keep in touch with anyone that you met while you were in the service?

CA- The ones I did keep in touch with are gone. They've died, so there's nobody else that I was b tge service that I'm in touch with anymore.

AC-That's cool that, at the time, that there was other people that went through World War II. I know a lot of people in my class are interviewing other people.

CA- Well yes, but we really didn't talk about it an awful lot, we had a, up here at the club, they had a Veteran's Day breakfast. First of all, they put out a circular to everybody, if you were a veteran let us know where you were and what you did. So then they had a breakfast, which is a lot better than the old fashioned chow line, let me tell you. They had pancakes and bacon and eggs and all kinds of stuff, and we just sat there and enjoyed it and we didn't talk about what we did too much. Some yeah, but not an awful lot, and one fellow said that the best food was in the submarine service. He was in the submarine service. So I said, "That was all volunteer wasn't it?" He said, "Yeah, young and foolish," he didn't say anything else.

AC- You don't really talk about it a whole lot?

CA- No, it's over and done with pretty much.

AC- Are there other parts of the world you'd like to see?

CA- That I'd like to see? Oh yes, but I've never had the opportunity. There's a number of places that I'd like to go and visit but we didn't for one reason or another and I don't think I'm going to go now. We've just gotten to that stage. Janet, my wife, is in a wheelchair most of the time and it's tough for her.

AC- If there was one thing that you wish my generation would remember about the World War II period of time, what do you think that would be?

CA- Well I should mention another book by Tom Brokaw *The Greatest Generation* that's a good book.

AC- In class we had to read *The Good War* by Studs Terkel and that was a pretty good book.

CA- Yes the *Greatest Generation* is good, that and *The War* by Ken Burns gives you, I think, an appreciation of what we went through. It wasn't all bad, but even on the home front you had to make sacrifices. There was shortages of this, that and the other and there was rationing, you're not going to die of lack of food or anything like that. If we had lost it would have been a big difference to your generation, but we didn't, no, we won. It wasn't just Americans, it was a whole bunch of other people that were with us. The thing disrupted everybody's lives not just young people that went off to service, but it had a disruptive influence on everybody because you couldn't go where you wanted to, you didn't have gasoline in the car for the car, you couldn't get tires for your car. You couldn't get all the food that you wanted to, there was rationing, but they were relatively minor sacrifices because the men and women in the service were making an even bigger sacrifice. I guess it's hard for me to try to explain to you what it was like. That's just the way it was and I don't know whether token people like us can give a good view or not, because each one of us obviously had different experiences. Good, bad or indifferent during the time.

AC- Thank you for sharing your story with me.

CA- Ha. If you wanted to find out what combat was like, then I'm not your man, but I just thought meeting Eisenhower and seeing really what kind of person he was meant a great deal to me.

AC- Yeah, how he had so much power, yet he was so humble.

CA- Yes because anyone [unclear] he became head of NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] when they formed NATO and of course he came back and became president for eight years. Talk about power, wow! But I don't think really, he ever changed basically.

AC- He was still the same person.

CA- I think so. Geez he had time to think about me out in the rain, which was nothing! He thought, why go through all this fancy stuff of marching and dressing up in a hot climate. You said before, it must have been tough trying to be in uniform, we were never in uniform! Except that one day. Then we had the tie and the leggings and the boots. It was hot. It was hot and he felt that was all unnecessary. I appreciate that.

AC- He sounds like a really good guy.

CA- I voted for him! Yes, he was, and he was I think, that way up until the end of his life. He used the same principles when he was president as when he was commander. A lot of what he had to decide was all kind of diverging opinions as to how to fight this war and you either pick a or b. If you pick a, b is going to be unhappy but he had the facility of making a decision and both sides be happy, it was his personality. [Laughter]

AC- [unclear] people.

CA- Yes and as it turns out he was great.

AC- Those were all the questions I had for you, thank you for letting me take your time.

CA- You made me feel young again at least for a little bit.