

## Dean Ladd

Tape 1 of 1

**Question:** It's just to give me your name, first and last and the correct spelling so I have it on tape and this also gives me a chance to set my audio levels so if you go ahead.

**Answer:** Yeah, I'm Dean Ladd, and you spell it D-E-A-N L-A-D-D.

**Question:** Now did you grow up in Spokane?

**Answer:** Yeah, yeah went through Rogers, born December 8th, 1920. Went to Bemis grade school and then Rogers. Graduated from Rogers in 1939 and ah, shortly after about the time I graduated I joined the organized Marine Reserve and roughly 150 men probably in it and that was in, in 1939 and then a little, about a year and a half later we were ah, called to active duty. We were gone for five years.

**Question:** Wow. So when you joined ah, when you signed up did you, how old were you?

**Answer:** I was 18.

**Question:** Just a kid.

**Answer:** Yep. Most of us were just out of high school or some in high school. And we thought, you know, before the war, well World War II had started, and you know, in Europe and nobody thought we'd ever get dragged into it course until Pearl Harbor but we ah, were.. were called to active duty on, in November, early November in 1940, same time as the National Guard and other reserves. And we were all led to believe we'd be about a year and we would ah, that would be it. But it just dragged on and on.

**Question:** Where did you ah, where did you first see active duty?

**Answer:** Ok we ah, we were sent to San Diego at the Marine base and they had a new camp called Camp Elliott and this was before Camp Pendleton, and that's where the ah, first, the ah, second Marine Brigade was formed. Ah then became the Second Marine Division in ah, see it was February of 1941, or '42. And ah then we ah, so we were there for about little over a year training and all and building up, getting equipped and all and we didn't have much of any equipment at that time and we were very short, very ill prepared actually. And ah, so then ah, then Pearl Harbor, and within, within a few weeks we were aboard ship on the Matson Liners heading to the South Pacific, Lord knows where we, we didn't know where we were going. Turned out that our regiment reinforced into a brigade, ah went to American Samoa and ah, they were, we were there for about eight or nine months ah, because more than likely the Japanese were going to try and take that point because it was where the supply line really was from United States down to New Zealand and Australia

**Answer:** And it would have happened if it hadn't been for Battle of Midway and roughly in May of '41, and that ah, that changed the whole complexion out there and now from then on it was the Americans on the offensive rather than the Japanese. Now the Japanese are trying to defend, to hold, what they'd already taken. But they were gonna, they were gonna take Samoa and Fiji and cut that pipeline, that supply line.

**Question:** 'Cause that's ah, I mean that's when you start to study the warfare, I mean that's so crucial. If you can cut that then...

**Answer:** There's a good article about that in the last "Heritage" magazine telling about Midway, the Battle of Midway, you know. Crucial.

## Dean Ladd

Tape 1 of 1

**Question:** So were you, so were you stationed on the island during that time?

**Answer:** Yeah, it was in Samoa for that, and we were spread all over the island, American Samoa, Tutuila, and ah, we, all we could do, all we could've done is just held on long as we could, we would've gotten over run, would have been overwhelmed. Any time you defend an island you, you're gonna get overwhelmed and that's what the Japanese found out. But we were scattered, covered, you know spread out on all the possible landing beaches.

**Question:** And in small clusters.

**Answer:** Yeah. And then we were prepared to withdraw. Hold out as long as we could on the beach and then withdraw back to a place to, a place where we could hold, do a withdrawal action and then bring in, bring in the reserves and do a counter attack so that basically is what the Japanese did later on.

**Question:** Now at that time did you think, um had the reality of war gone into your mind at that time?

**Answer:** Well it, you know, it all, you know is incremental, slowly developing and at the time I don't think we realized the grave danger we were in that, you know, the Japanese could just as well have invaded, taken our island. But ah, we talked a lot about that in the book that we're doing a rewrite on. This is kind of a key area to talk about the leading up, the leading up to us getting finally geared up where we can, ah, take the offensive.

**Question:** So were you having just to pass a lot of time sitting on this island?

**Answer:** Well primarily developing our defenses and ah, learning all we could about jungle warfare. We're hearing about what the Japanese, how they were fighting in Guadalcanal and this, ah, they were fighting three months on Guadalcanal ah, the Marines were fighting the Japanese and then some Army joined a month later. And then we, then our regiment went into Guadalcanal and was replaced by the Samoans, the Samoan Reserves and other, other Marines that came there for training purposes.

**Question:** So was um, so when you went into Guadal it hadn't been secured at that point, it was just...

**Answer:** No it was, Guadalcanal at that time, ah see they landed, the Marines first landed there August 7th, 1942, and ah, there was no resistance on Guadalcanal itself there was over in Tulagi which is across the bay. Terrific fighting for two days. But ah, the Japanese had just finished their landing site, their landing, their airfield there, so they were just getting ready to use that in an offensive way to cut our supply lines. So um, it, so there was no fighting initially but then the Japanese came in with ah, heavy, they had us completely outclassed as far as Naval and air, especially Naval. And they brought their battleships and cruisers in and just blasted the dickens out of us. I wasn't there at that time ah, I was there starting in from in early November for three months.

**Answer:** And the turn around was ah, was probably the middle part of November when there was major Naval battles just off of Guadalcanal. And these, and the results of these Naval battles would be just about a draw. They lost as many ships as we did and they were usually night battles and they did not know friend from foe really.

**Question:** That's when I see the film footage of the ships firing, all you see is a bright light and then blackness.

## Dean Ladd

Tape 1 of 1

**Answer:** Yep, oh yeah. I was ah, I was ah in my foxhole up on a ridge where I could look down and see this at night and there's two different nights that the major, that the fighting was going on, and yeah, you'd see these, you'd see these shells with red hot, you'd see 'em come arcing across and then you'd see big explosion and so on. But ah, it was, then the next day and we saw these ships of our ships that were coming in, they were towed in some just we watched as they sank, the soldiers, I mean the sailors were getting off and it was ah, it was really something. That was the turning point.

**Question:** How, what does an 18-year-old kid thinking at this point?

**Answer:** You know I think that ah, when you're young you think you're invincible and you think what an adventure and you don't think of yourself as really ah, in danger of being killed. You're thinking that more it's like it's a movie and it's playing, you're not playing for keeps, you're playing for fun. You know, you don't really realize that. Well eventually ah, it soaks in course when you're seeing all the death but ah, even so, by now you've become steeled to it so it's just ah, you can accept it.

**Question:** So the mind must be an awfully powerful...

**Answer:** I think that ah, you know that your system's made up so that it you know, nothing is more than you can bear.

**Question:** So when you got sent to Guadal what was your duty, what was...

**Answer:** Oh, ok. That was interesting thing. I got a, I was a corporal at that time and had a machine gun squad, light machine gun squad, and I was sent to a machine gun leadership school that in effect was an officers school. And I got a field commission, second lieutenant. And I returned to the same company that I had been listed man in and ah, within a month was on my way to Guadalcanal with them to end combat. So it was ah, it was a very trying time. Here you are with a totally different relationship and you're, and now you have to prove yourself in combat and I'll never forget that, you know, that wouldn't have worked out as well for me if it hadn't been for the first sergeant who was, most first sergeants are good at eating somebody out you know, and I was ate out like everybody else before I was commissioned. When I was commissioned I'd overhear him say, "Now you listen to the lieutenant. You do what he tells you or you're gonna reckon with me." You know, it was great.

**Question:** So that allowed to to come in as, not only having been enlisted with 'em but still a young kid I mean...

**Answer:** Yeah, oh yeah I was, 'cause at that time I was only 22 you see, just a kid and you've got all that responsibility for making decisions that are life and death decisions for thirty-some odd men that you have under your command if you're a platoon leader. Then I became eventually I was a company commander in the Marianas towards the end of it.

**Question:** So you got the orders then and they put you on one of the landing craft and they sent you over to Guadal, is that how it...

**Answer:** Yeah, whole regiment. Our whole regiment was sent to ah, 'cause we, what was happening in Guadalcanal, ah there was about equal number of troops of Japanese and ours. They just kept coming in, just coming in, ah escalating until we started getting the upper hand as far as air coverage was concerned. It was still nip and tuck right up to November 15th, ah, about the Naval side. Then when, now we could prevent them from bringing in food and so on

## Dean Ladd

Tape 1 of 1

and bringing in reinforcements so they were real bad shape as far as their health, they were starving, they had disease, they had malaria and what not and but nevertheless, 10,000 of 'em withdrew, and we didn't know they were doing that, but withdrew and got off, that's what happened to this ah, Akeotani that I just showed you about. That's how he got off.

**Question:** So before that they're kind of loading one end of the island and you...

**Answer:** Yep, they were coming in one side and we were coming in the other side. We were just a standoff. Here we had, we had probably 20 or 30,000 on each side just hammering away at each other.

**Question:** Oh, so you artillery fire or...

**Answer:** Lot of artillery fire yeah, lot of artillery fire. Mostly harassing from their point. We called, we called, this fellow I was corresponding with, any artillery we called him Pistol Pete and so he became known as Pistol Pete kind of since the war we call him that.

**Question:** They weren't dug in then like in Iwo Jima, they didn't have...

**Answer:** No, no, no they weren't. No entirely different tactics. Ah, see Iwo Jima that's all they could do in a small area, it was to dig down way deep and it's impossible to get 'em out, course. You know, and their tactic was to um, not defend, not to oppose you much in your landing but to come at you in the next day or two with counter attacks and that's the way they fought. And if, and they would keep coming until they were all killed. They just keep coming, coming, coming, there was no turning back. Once they started there was no flexibility to change their tactics or to withdraw. So that's what happened to them, it was terrible from their standpoint.

**Question:** So they basically were given the orders go here and we don't care what happens.

**Answer:** You'll go here and you just, the objective is just keep going until, you know, until everybody, until you're killed.

**Question:** So as time went by...

**Answer:** They were known as bonzai. Bonzai attacks, counter attacks.

**Question:** Yeah, yeah.

**Answer:** Take as many with you as you can while you're doing it.

**Question:** And it's an honor, I guess it was an honor if they did die.

**Answer:** Oh yeah. When you take now on the Marianas on the Island of Saipan, ah, here was an example where the last, the last few days they ah, they were giving, they were given the orders from on down, apparently it came down to make the last bonzai attack. Every man got killed eventually, 4,000 in one day, kept coming, kept coming, kept coming, 4,000 were killed and they took about 750 of us in the process, they just completely over ran us.

**Answer:** So one of 'em, as a few got through, and they were stragglers and some were still in the mountains after 'til the war was over. And one of 'em is one I write about in my

## Dean Ladd

Tape 1 of 1

book. Oba, his name Oba, and he was an infantry captain and I interviewed him in um, in Japan in '85 in his home.

**Question:** So he was one of the ones left in ah...

**Answer:** Yeah, and he walked out at the end of the war, after the war was over, with about 30, 35 of his troops.

**Question:** That must have been interesting to be able to sit at a different time of history, a different place with somebody who was your enemy and to be able to have a conversation with him.

**Answer:** Yeah, I was sitting in um, his home which is not too far from Nagoya and ah, he ah, very influential, quite a well to do man and he, in his city of I forget the name of it now, Yama, see I can't think of the name, but anyway here we sat in his nice home and ah, we had, and we had a nice dinner and ah, we were talking about the reason I wanted to interview him was that um, when I had returned, when I returned to Saipan, been back twice to all these places, and each time I ah, be six weeks at a time retracing my steps, and this first time in returning I found that this, this Oba, Captain Oba, ah had been there three times on his returns and he left with another fellow that's living out there now, a map that showed the route of all the places he'd been. Well his, his ah, route intersected mine on this particular day. It was the day after the bonzai attack and so I just wanted to find out. And I said, "This is where you were?" And he said, "Yes." And I said, "Were you the one that was every other word was bonzai and so on?" And he says, "No that was another one but," he says, "yeah, I remember it." So what happened, happened and that was interesting because here I was ah, at that particular time we were burying all these bodies, thousands of bodies, just drag them in to bulldozer come and make a long, make a long trench and then we dragged 'em all into the, into the ah trench. And we were doing that for three days. Well I had a couple days, well about a week before, a little less, I had, I received a shrapnel wound in my right elbow. All walking wounded, like I was a walking wounded, were sent up because we had this bonzai attack we had to clean up. And ah, so I was going back to get my arm dressed to the battalion aid station, I was alone and I was walking back through this brush and I saw this um, I saw a leg down there and I, oh, golly I hope that wasn't one of our Marines, maybe Marine body down there, if it's down there alive it was a Japanese and there were three of them in there and they were gonna let me go through because they were all hiding. These guys had gotten through our lines and now they were going to wait 'til evening and then make another counter attack. That's what they were doing. Well so ah, I had my carbine and I shot and killed three of them and got out of there as fast as I could. Anyway, this is right where this Captain Oba's, where, right near he was. And these were his men and ah, that night 40, 40 of his men were killed making another counter attack to our battalion aid station and CP from this, I had walked right through the whole darn group of 'em. (laughs)

**Question:** Wow.

**Question:** What was the then, because you I assume enlisted, got in the Marines because you were gonna serve our country.

**Answer:** Ah, I was ah, involved in rifle shooting and I had one year at Washington State College, now University and I was on the varsity rifle team and we shot 22 indoor and postal matches where we'd send our records back and forth and we were the, we were the champions for the 9th Corp area which covers the whole west coast and Alaska and Hawaii. And so my dad was quite a shot before and so I got into it. And so anyway Marines are great for rifle shooting so and then we had the big attraction in '39 was we were all going to go to

## Dean Ladd

Tape 1 of 1

our two week encampment to San Diego so that's what happened and a lot were pulled in 'cause you know, there's adventure, you're going to travel and yeah.

**Question:** When you sat and talked with this Japanese gentleman was that, 'cause I mean war is, you know war is war, and I've never been there so I can't fully understand it, I only know from talking to vets but there is a certain better thee than me, they're shooting at me I'm shooting at them, I'm gonna survive. But now years later when you sit down out of war, 'cause it's real weird, our society says it's not right to kill and then we say, ok, war ok it's right to kill or protection to kill. So now you're back in this other environment and sitting with this person. Was that an uncomfortable experience?

**Answer:** Not at all for me but it is for an awful lot. Ah, I had no scars as far as that sort of a relationship was concerned. Ah, no we both, we looked at it, all of us looked at it, well ok all of us went through this horrible time and sure I was faithful to my emperor and to my ancestors and sure I was faithful to my buddy you know, not to let him, you know, want to work as a team, you know and faithful to the Marine Corp and all that. So we had the same things were motivating us. But during the war we didn't think about these as much, we thought about, oh these, our enemy is all drunk on sake and they're a bunch of wild people and not realizing that they had faith, more so than probably we did.

**Question:** That's where, our history books at least, history a lot of times is told one sided. That's why I'm interested in your book where you're looking at the juxtaposition of things where, you know we were fighting for the right of our country.

**Answer:** Now, if a person, if a Japanese soldier, ah, didn't commit hari-kari, if he wasn't killed in battle, and if he was missing, but if he was missing it would go on the records in Japan that he was dead and they had a memorial site for him and the ah, family received whatever remuneration there was, there's no way he could go back and get back in that system again. He was a nonentity. He'd go back, if he'd survive he'd go back and he could, maybe the wife had remarried and all he could is just be ah, maybe not even letting them know he's around, maybe observing, but he's not letting them know he's back there. So he's kind of a ghost. So this is one thing that the Japanese told me was the situation after the war. And it was interesting too, that the veteran for Guadalcanal was telling me about the veteran from Saipan. Ah that without identifying who they were talking about I knew, it was obvious who he was talking about. Here now here, this is 50 years later, almost 50 years later, 45 years later talking this way. He said, "Some consider themselves patriots when they should have committed hari-kari." And he was talking to, he was talking about my other Japanese I've interviewed on Saipan, that he should have committed hari-kari, he should not have survived, he's no longer, he wasn't really a patriot. Interesting. I figured, well I better just drop this subject.

**Question:** Wow, 50 years later.

**Answer:** Can you imagine.

**Question:** Yeah. Wow, hah.

**Question:** So where did you, after Guadal where did you um?

**Answer:** Ok, Guadalcanal then we went back, we went to New Zealand for about eight months and here we got our health back. We had, most of us had malaria by now and ah, we got replacements, we got re-equipped, retrained for a different kind of, a different kind of a battle situation, we were, 'cause they were expecting us now to go out into the atoll Islands

## Dean Ladd

Tape 1 of 1

where now you didn't have a jungle. You had to make a landing across the beach. And up until that time ah, there'd been no testing of our amphibious techniques, of landing on a beach. And ah, the only way that, to get there would be, was a new kind of equipment that turns out to be the amphibian tractor, it had tracks. And until that time ah, they used it the first time in Guadalcanal but only as logistics just for carrying things up a river, across a river, and that sort of thing but not for an assault landing. So Tarawa was the first time it was used for an assault and um, our generals were just emphatic that we had to have enough of these at least for the first waves. And so we had, we got, turned out a 100 and I forget the figure now, 150 or so. We lost probably 80% of them, were knocked out going in. And hopefully, you know, they'd be able to go back and they could transfer from one kind of a landing craft that floated over to another kind that could use tracks could climb over the reef and go on in. So anyway I was on one of those that, on the second day, I went in on the second day because we were, our particular battalion was gonna go ah, in by rubber boats further on up and cut off the Japanese as they tried to get away. Well instead, we got sent into the same beach that was the worst possible one, we had a lack of communications. And ah, so we went in on the second morning at just about daybreak on the worst possible beach you could've been on. We just got cut down and lost half my men just getting 'em to the beach. And here it started when the tide was low so our boats could not get into the beach, we were over 500 yards out where the reef was, so we had to wade in water anywhere from ah, from knee on up over your head ah, into the beach and it could take an hour to get there. In the meantime you're being shot at by many machine guns and mortars just peppering you all over the place. So that's what happened. And so I got shot going in, just a matter of ah, matter of about 10 minutes or something like that after I jumped out of the landing boat and I got shot just above the belt, just went through the, just barely missed my spinal cord, my spinal nerve and only reason I survived was that one of my men grabbed on to me, kept me from drowning and dragged me back to the landing boat which was ah, under the charge of um, Eddie Albert, the famous movie actor, and ah, who had instructed one of his captains to take his boat over and pick up these wounded. And I was one of about 15 wounded that were shoved over that, shoved into the boat, taken back to the same transport that we'd come in there on. I was the first one on the operating table and low and behold, the surgeon who worked on me had been an abdominal specialist from Mayo Clinic. Can you imagine, here I had an abdominal wound and I had that kind of help. The only thing that saved my life.

**Answer:** So then I recovered in a matter of three weeks, I mean three months in Hawaii and then I was in two more campaigns afterwards, Saipan and Tinian.

**Question:** Being shot like that what goes, now when you got in the water you have the backpack on...

**Answer:** Yeah you have a pack.

**Question:** You've got your gun you're trying to...

**Answer:** Trying to get to the beach as fast as you can and if anybody that is hit, is wounded, you're not supposed to, you're not to stop because then everybody'd get killed. So, see, my man violated that. He saved my life but he wasn't supposed 'cause you're supposed to everybody get in as fast as they could.

**Question:** Do you know if your, that guy...

**Answer:** No I haven't. I lost contact and I haven't found him. But others, others that I and our reunions that were right there and saw it, course.

## Dean Ladd

Tape 1 of 1

**Question:** Hm. And so you get sent back to Hawaii to rehab for a couple, three months...

**Answer:** Yeah, six months in this case.

**Question:** Are you thinking I want to get back out there or are you thinking ok I know...

**Answer:** Well you're thinking your time's about up because you know, you've already used up your, your percentage of chances of getting through. Each time that you go into an assault landing like that, you know, you've maybe 30, you got maybe a, um you expect maybe a third of them are gonna be wounded or killed you know, just getting to the beach if you're in the assault, in the assault troops. So, you know, if you go, you go through four times four campaigns like that times 30, 40% you know, you're well over 100%.

**Question:** So from, so which was your next campaign after that?

**Answer:** The next one after that was Saipan and Saipan is north of ah, Guam, it's in the Marianas, and it was entirely a different kind of ah, of a ah, of um geology than Taraw

**Answer:** Tarawa was just flat, only about six feet off the ground was the highest, with coconut trees and very small. And getting back to Tarawa again, can you imagine this? Tarawa is defended by about 4,500 which included some Korean construction workers. On a piece of land that was one square mile and it was about two miles long, the major part, two miles long, half a mile wide, all dug in with, with ah, bunkers using coconut logs and sand up over that. And ah, so that many defending it, heavily defended with, and all the machine guns all the way around, artillery up to, up to size eight inch, three eight inch Naval guns on there, too. And we landed, ah upwards of 7,000. Now you can imagine this, here is over, here is over 10, here is over 10,000 men on one square mile fighting three days. Can you imagine this? On one square mile, and flat. So anybody, the ah, bullets and artillery and what not could come from any direction. So that's what it was. Pretty, it was as concentrated as it could be.

**Question:** Did we not know, did we not have good enough information?

**Answer:** We knew exactly how many they had, we knew exactly, almost exactly, you know, the ah, how many men were there and pretty much what the, what the type of armament there as. But we never had any experience yet, the United States nobody had, as far as the effectiveness of Naval fire to soften up and Naval gun fire on a target that is only that high, most of it just skips, goes over, doesn't do anything, you know, you don't hit it. And ah, so maybe they lost, maybe 50% were killed in that bombardment, you still had a couple of thousand so that's what you're up against.

**Question:** And did we come in all at one beach or did we come in at different beaches?

**Answer:** No we landed, we landed on the lagoon side, north side, and it was on three beaches but the first beach was just, it was completely hopeless. And the one I was on was bad, very bad, too. The thing is that you were getting, you were getting shot at from a very well dug in fortified position and it was coming at you from the front and coming at you from the flanks. And then there was a beached transport ah, out on the reef and the Japanese had swum out there the first night and they put a couple of machine guns on there so that when I came in here they're shooting at us from down from there as well. So it was coming from every direction.

**Question:** And why was this, was this island key for a reason?

## Dean Ladd

Tape 1 of 1

**Answer:** It was key only for a short period of time. It was a, to provides an effect a unsinkable carrier for, for ah, for our planes to take off to take to support taking the next place, the next place being the Marianas. So it was, you know, it was only a stepping stone. So that was the only purpose of it. And there's been a lot of arguments since. Was that even necessary. But you see the thing was that all of our experiences up until then like in Guadalcanal and almost, almost losing, you know, and almost lost Midway, almost, almost got shoved off of Guadalcanal, and here we're in, and now we're in so far into their territory that we could get cut off again, see. So that's when we had to get it in real quick and ah, so they, um. So there were, they didn't want to go in too far each time, you had to take a bite, a bite that you could cover it from, with fighter support, and the only way you're gonna get fighter support is from each of these stepping stones. As it was we lost an aircraft carrier there, the Liscom bay, they lost all hands, they lost, they roughly a thousand lives were lost, they sunk by submarine.

**Question:** Did ah, and did you lose a lot of your men?

**Answer:** We had ah, let's see now, all of the defenders except 17 Japanese were killed. And there were probably 50 or maybe a little more ah, the Koreans that survived ah, the Marines lost a little over a thousand killed and 2,500 wounded, which I was one of those, in three days fighting which is pretty expensive. And they still don't know, of course, where probably a third of the bodies are. They're just, most of them just washed out to se

**Answer:**

**Question:** Wow.

**Answer:** Yeah.

**Question:** So then you, you went to Tinian, was that next?

**Answer:** Yeah, ok now Saipan, I mentioned that and that, that was particularly bad in that they had a lot of artillery. They didn't defend much on the beach but they had the artillery back behind the mountains, Howitzers, they'd shoot over the mountain and down and they had it all registered in so they covered all the beaches like they did on Iwo Jim

**Answer:** And that beach was just well, well covered and they had spotters that could register moving around to where it was needed the most. And ah, so then they fought a, some of it was hard. We had two days of very, very bad counter battery fire, well artillery fire coming in on us, it was bad. And we lost, we lost, well couple, we had well over a thousand or two thousand just you know, on the beach on Saipan but ah, then they fought the withdrawal action, the Japanese, and this is a mountainous country and goes up to 1,500 feet so they were just, it was hard. You're fighting uphill and they're looking down at you all the time and ah, until finally, that was three weeks. Three weeks of very hard fighting.

**Question:** So was this a similar landing? I mean you took an amphibian in and...

**Answer:** Yeah, now we had adequate amphibians in this case and took us all the way in. There was a reef and you went over it just the same way and there's one scary thing though that in Saipan, the second or third day ah, the Japanese ah, Navy was gonna try and take it back. And so there was a major Naval battle ah that went on, it was called the Marianas Turkey Shoot and ah, Battle of the Philippine Sea, another name. But ah, we just lambasted the dickens out of 'em with, because they no longer had the caliber of the pilots they had before, they were getting down to the bottom of the barrel of the supply of pilots so they lost,

## Dean Ladd

Tape 1 of 1

they lost an awful lot of planes, many times more than we lost in that battle. But ah, that pretty well, that battle that was called Marianas Turkey Shoot was kind of a last fling of the Japanese Navy. From then on it was Kamikazes doing it.

**Question:** So was it the type of deal where the U.S. Navy is out on one side of the island out here and...

**Answer:** No what happened was, of course our scouts out knew where they were coming in and went after them and so the battle was hundreds of miles away to the west, northwest I guess. So then the purpose of taking Saipan of course primarily was to gain an airfield that was, that you could now bomb Japan. See it was 1,500 miles from Japan. But the problem with that was you had to have fighter support halfway up and that's where Iwo Jima comes in. They had to have a place there for fighters to give support to the bombers. Many of these bombers were damaged dropping the bombs over Japan and when they coming back well they, many just didn't make it without the fighter support. So then the purpose of, so that was for that kind of airfield and then, then Tinian was just a very short distance away from Saipan, only 15 miles away. And that worked real well in that um, that close we had artillery in Saipan and shot over to Tinian and so we just clobbered the dickens out them, the opposition there. And that lasted only a little over a week, week and a half on Tinian. Minor, minor casualties compared to Saipan. But um that and Tinian is where the ah, Enola Gay had the atomic bomb mounted on, took off from.

**Question:** Were you there at that time?

**Answer:** Oh no, no.

**Question:** So I assume the Japanese didn't have the shells to be able to, I mean...

**Answer:** No they were, they were practically ah, very ineffective in ah, stopping our advance. They were ah, completely ah, well shot their word, shot their chances probably just the oh, the first or second day when they made their first counter attacks and they just couldn't get their act together. They were just fighting and delaying action all the way back.

**Question:** So when you were on the various islands were you foxhole living?

**Answer:** Oh yeah, course, sure.

**Question:** And would you get in and then set an encampment or what is the type of thing... See these islands aren't very big that you were on.

**Answer:** No well what you're doing, you're on the line you know, ah, and your line of skirmishes clear across the island. And you're moving during the day and at night you're dug in, you've got your barbed wire out there 'cause they're gonna attack you, they would counter attack at night, always a counter attack at night. So you and that's, so you were advancing during the day and ah, then at night you were holding as they were counter attacking you and they could be all around you at night. Yeah.

**Question:** Could you hear 'em, I mean at night?

**Answer:** Yeah, yeah the last ah, oh let's see, the next, well just a couple of nights before the island was secured we, I was company commander and we took a ridge and we had to get up to that ridge. The battalion commander was on me. He said, "Dean, we just gotta get there tonight, there's just no way around it, we gotta take that ridge." So we just barely did it but

## Dean Ladd

Tape 1 of 1

when we did it, we held the ridge, and it was coral, you couldn't dig in very much, we had barbed wire, barbed wire out in front of us but there was a gap between our battalion and the other division, the 4th Marine division. And there was a gap of hundreds and hundreds of yards and the Japanese were good at locating these gaps and they came right through and right up behind us and they were just among us all night long. It was a miserable night. See that was one of the places I wanted to find on my return and I found it. And my radio operator shared my foxhole with me and I remember he was on the phone with another operator with a 81 millimeter mortar platoon and he says they asked for help to lay the, lay the line, the wire for communication and he says, "I'll meet you down there on the road if I don't get my head shot off." He was killed. He didn't come back and they finally found his body. And then the ah, the adjacent foxhole was a company commander of the other company adjacent to me and that was this one I told you about that I'd been all through high school and the Marines together and he was company commander of that, of that adjacent company. And his radio operator got shot and he was groaning all night long, so it was a miserable night.

**Question:** Again these are all just kids like you, basically.

**Answer:** Yeah, yeah teenagers in most cases, yeah.

**Question:** Is it tough, I mean I guess everybody's in the same boat so to speak, so sending your troops in and commanding your men and things like that, knowing some are going some are not coming back. Does your mind, I mean the movies make everything so dramatic and everything like that, is it an issue of that or is it, or is it...

**Answer:** Well you don't have any, there's no choice, you know. You're caught up in it and you don't know where it can go. All you can do is, you just got to go along with it you know, there just, there's no other alternative and you know your odds are really against you, you know. Yeah.

**Question:** 'Cause I know sometimes they talk about not stir crazy but the soldiers that, you know, their mind kind of let's go on 'em and stuff like that. Did you face...

**Answer:** Well yeah we had men with battle fatigue, you know, shell shock, but um, probably no different as it is today.

**Question:** You're trained to do a job and ah...

**Answer:** It's a real, you know, it's very stressful of course, but um after a while, you've been there for a while, you're getting steeled to it too. Then you're at the point where almost to the point where you don't care, you know. Just ah, very strange, all right. When we, on Saipan, when we had the last bonzai attack, the largest bonzai attack of the war, 4,000 of them were killed, the Japanese coming, trying to take back, take back the island. Didn't get very far but ah, they overran the Army unit. The Army unit they overran they found gaps in the fence line. They didn't have enough troops to really cover the whole area so they were in strong points and these, the Japanese found these gaps and came right on through and so when we passed through their lines, my unit passed through their lines and these soldiers were just, they were really decimated and ah, I remember one soldier told me that he said, "I'm not here because I want to be here I was drafted," and he said, "I'm here against my wishes." And he says, "You young Marines, you don't know any better," he says, "you're young, you don't even know when you're, you know, got danger you know," he says. "I'm old enough to know." He made no bones about it (laughs). And I say, yeah, it's, you've got something there.

## Dean Ladd

Tape 1 of 1

**Question:** Do you, did you sleep?

**Answer:** What you do, is you have, usually you have two men in a foxhole and then you take turns, one being awake all the time.

**Question:** But do you, I mean do...

**Answer:** You get awfully tired, you're awfully tired. You only get half a night's sleep and the next you're gonna have to, you're gonna have to go through a lot more on a very stressful day.

**Question:** So is, does fear and adrenaline and all that come in to play to override the tiredness?

**Answer:** Well. You're pretty, you're pretty, um it's wearing you down but you're young, you've got a lot of resilience I guess.

**Question:** It sounds like you're, you were always on the move, there wasn't a time when you just sat.

**Answer:** If you were on, if you were on the front line, yes, you were always, you were either holding position or you were moving, you were advancing. And usually in these cases were always advancing.

**Question:** How did communication work, 'cause if you're all dug in a foxhole and you're moving all day and you're dug in at night...

**Answer:** Now at night...

**Question:** You can't just you know, let's call a pow wow and sit out here as targets, how did you...

**Answer:** We course we had, you know we had, we had telephone and hard wire. And then we had radios, too, but radios at that time radios were not too reliable. Had trouble with it, especially in the tropics when it got wet and so on.

**Question:** So you were going to say something about at night...

**Answer:** Yeah, at night, the thought was, here we'd be dug in, anybody that moved was enemy, you better not be out moving around because anybody's moving is enemy, was gonna get shot. And if you were usually, if you've got a position hopefully that's a good position that's maybe on a high ground where they're gonna have to come up at you, climb up a hill to get to you, maybe, hopefully. That's the way it was for instance on Guadalcanal and so in my mind people are throwing hand grenades down. You hear a little noise, you throw a hand grenade down there.

**Question:** Um, the um, when you look out is it kind of sparse with just...

**Answer:** Tinian, Tinian was ah one big truck garden you might say. The Japanese had it very well developed and they were, they grew like watermelons, melons, cantaloupes I remember all kinds of peanuts. Now it's completely run down, it's just nothing but one big cattle ranch and a lot of just overgrown bushes called tangen.. tangen that were planted after the war to prevent erosion and now it's gotten out of hand.

## Dean Ladd

Tape 1 of 1

**Question:** Hm, like our scotch broom.

**Answer:** Yeah. So now the reason, now too, we're ah, we put a lot of money, our country did into ah, building a good international airport at Tinian, Saipan and other of those islands in case of we had to fall back from the Philippines where we are now and Okinawa where we are now so Tinian now is, there is a possibility of being of being a fall back position.

**Question:** What, you talked about it being a big truck garden, was as you were going through are some of these fruits and vegetables still...

**Answer:** Yeah, they were there, yeah.

**Question:** So you could get a little bit of fresh fruit.

**Answer:** A little bit, yeah you could.

**Question:** I was, 'cause having not been there and I just see you know a place that's been shelled and sand all around and not any, anything that would be a picture of life, it just sounds like in the middle of here some fresh watermelon here and there.

**Answer:** Yep.

**Question:** I talked to one gentleman, Don Newbold, from over in Olympia, he said you know time went by and he was finally talking to one of his buddies and all of a sudden he asked his buddy, "Do you remember going to the bathroom in Iwo?" and his buddy said, "No I don't. I can remember peeing in my foxhole a couple of times but other than..." And Don said, "You know we must have been the most constipated men over there." Which I assume that wasn't a, like you said, if you got out of your foxhole at night you were a target.

**Answer:** Oh yeah. Like there's an example, the first night on Saipan this one, one second lieutenant I knew that he was in the other company and he, he was out of his foxhole and he was walking, he was walking towards ah, towards his company commander and I thought the company commander did it but I found out just recently no, it was probably somebody else but he was shot right in the head 'cause he was up moving around.

**Question:** Friendly fire.

**Answer:** Oh yeah sure, thought he was enemy.

**Question:** 'Cause I assume that at night, you're looking out and if it's a full moon...

**Answer:** All you're seeing is just a dark object, you can't identify anybody. Anything that's moving, you better watch out it'd get in the foxhole with you.

**Question:** Now were your foxholes flat, lay down foxholes or did you dig 'em down, down deep?

**Answer:** Oh you'd dig down as far as you can dig. You know, you'd be down maybe a foot or two.

**Question:** Now you weren't facing the dysentery and all that or were you facing that?

## Dean Ladd

Tape 1 of 1

**Answer:** Sometimes you would, you bet, you bet.

**Question:** 'Cause that's the thing, you know, talked to some people in Merrill's Marauders that were talking about you know, here you're trying to fight a war and this is a stage you're in.

**Answer:** Oh yeah, oh yeah. The Japanese had that problem a lot. Yeah you had, that's the reason you had to have good field sanitation. Have slit trenches, you know, have some kind of discipline there. The Japanese didn't do that very well.

**Question:** That seems like, that doesn't seem to fit with war, good field sanitation, I mean it seems like you're just too busy fighting a war to worry about things like that but those are the things that...

**Answer:** Yeah.

**Question:** Somebody was talking about the Bataan death march and saying you know, if you're healthy it wasn't that bad but the thing was is there's starving and dysentery and everything.

**Answer:** Oh yeah. We lost one of the veterans to that here just in the last two years. Very interesting.

**Answer:** Let's see, what haven't I told you know, let me just think. So I stayed active in the ah, in the Reserves and went back to do the training and I took correspondence courses for total of 30 years and retired lieutenant colonel.

**Question:** What do you think the history books are leaving out? I mean especially because you were kind of a scholar and you've gone and done a lot of research. What are they...

**Answer:** Well they're not ah, from what I gather um, it's a little bit too early and they're not ready for it. They're not interested in hearing about it at the age that they hear about it. It's not that it's not, at some point in their curriculum it's covered but it, it isn't making any impact.

**Question:** Why do think that is? Just because of a lack of experience?

**Answer:** Well, well their just not ready for it, they don't appreciate it. You know, I can tell, I told here, I tell these teenagers, you know that these men died, they were your age. They just couldn't picture that, you know. They're just a bunch of kids just like you.

**Question:** Did you have to write any letters home to kid's parents?

**Answer:** I didn't, the company commander, the company commander had to do a lot of that, yeah, I didn't no.

**Question:** Boy that'd be devastating.

**Answer:** Then at the, then when the atomic bomb was dropped I was at that time I was um, company commander back in Quantico, the basic school. And I had one platoon of Naval Academy graduates and one platoon of senior NCO's, Naval Commission Officers, and ah, Naval Academy graduates were commissioned, they were second lieutenants, and the NCO's

## Dean Ladd

Tape 1 of 1

were at that time still officer candidates and they had their enlisted rank. None of them decided to stay on and go on to become officers after the bomb was dropped.

**Question:** Wow, huh. So you were at Quantico when you heard about the bomb being dropped.

**Answer:** Yeah, yeah.

**Question:** And having been over there and seen what the real warfare was like, what was your feeling when you?

**Answer:** Oh what a relief, gee. You know, here we were everybody was gearing up for the major invasion of Japan and that would've been, who knows, a million more casualties plus the Japanese would've lost a lot more than that.

**Question:** That's when you hear the stories that they already had the purple hearts all ready to go.

**Answer:** Oh. Yeah. Yeah it ah, you know, they knew the rail, that what it was gonna be like because they just would not, they would not surrender they'd fight to the last man. That's in their philosophy, Bushido code.

**Question:** When you corresponded with the Japanese gentleman that you've talked to, ah, your version of history and their version of history other than being told from the opposite side, did they align?

**Answer:** Well, I guess the main thing I learned was just what motivated them verse what motivated us. Ah, they had, you know, talked about the Bushido code and they, that's all they knew from the time they went through grade school and had military indoctrination. And so that's all they knew, course ah, you know the soldier or the sailor but ah, course the main thing was like I mentioned earlier is being faithful to the emperor and their ancestors not that their ancestors, not be a disgrace to their ancestors. They felt very strongly about you know, their ancestors were, they went to a spirit world. And ah, it's kind of interesting, when I correspond with the ah, these veterans, you know they talk about heaven, you know, and during the war they believed for instance, that when they died in battle as a warrior, their soul would be in the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo and some day maybe they would rise to be a warrior again. And so when I visited Japan in '85 well my friend Tani took me there to that shrine. But ah, here this is the place where all these ones that were killed thought that their soul was going you know. It was their interim step to go to heaven I guess. So then when the Japanese like these two, the one I met in primarily the one in Guadalcanal but also others, ah was to get proper burial to all these that had died in battle. They wanted to find, they wanted to find the bones, collected as many bones as they could and then they would go through this Shinto ceremony where they would give, it'd be proper ceremony so those souls would no longer be ah, prevented from going where they were going to be going.

**Question:** Do you think that um, looking ahead to future generations that you and I will never meet, what's the message that should be left to them from World War II or about World War II?

**Answer:** Message, message with who?

**Question:** To generations that you and I will never meet.

## Dean Ladd

Tape 1 of 1

**Answer:** Future generations?

**Question:** Yeah. Because this is gonna be history in you know...

**Answer:** Well, I guess in future generations there will always be, there will always be conflict. It will be in a different form like ah, I've done a lot of genealogy and so on and reading about ancestors that go way back, well I've got ancestors that go into royalty. And course the way they fought was so different you know and ah, horrible things, we think of horrible things right now but it was really just a different way of doing it. Still you get killed whether it was, there it was more personal and you know, direct confrontation but ah, you know and then in World War II you had these major Naval battles. You'll never see that again, like that, never see that. And you'll never see all the dog fights, you'll never see that again 'cause we have now entirely different situation where targets can be hit by smart bombs, long distance off, very accurately like was done in Ira

**Question:** And then coming further down stream on that, in the future we'll be non-piloted, controlled by control way back. But there still is always gonna have to be though, the person that is gonna come in and hold that property that, once it's been taken. So we're still, you still have to do that. So now what the Marine Corp is doing course is ah, they need new kind of equipment that they can approach from a long way off and get in fast like this osprey that has a tilt rotor. And the whole idea to that is to ah, so that they can do a lot better maneuvering, getting in they have to go over a beach someplace. They come in real fast over somewhere else and that's maneuver warfare.

**Question:** How proud are you of your service?

**Answer:** Course very proud of it. You know, everybody was if they, they felt it was your duty and you're defending your country. It was a very trying time. We had, we had world dictators that were, if they would, if they had got the upper hand which they had gotten very close to doing, and have a madman like Hitler, he could've very well, they could've very well made it. And if it hadn't been for the way, just by, just by happenstance that we won in Midway, we still would've won but it would have just drawn out a lot further I'm sure, would've been a lot more lives lost. But ah, we just had, we had a few men like that, that Hitler, that caused all that grief. And you always have, you always have power hungry people that just human nature I guess.

**Question:** I mean your branch of the service, you know again, everybody did their job and all that but the Marines, I mean I assume you being in it feel this, I mean the Marines definitely are cut from a little different cloth.

**Answer:** Oh yeah, yeah.

**Question:** I mean when I see, whether it be veteran Marines or present day Marines um, and the fact that you guys are usually first in...

**Answer:** Well there's a sense of longing and ah, you know the code and the motto of always faithful and ah, just drilled into you that you were the best and that you know, you could handle any situation. Yeah, it means a lot, just the psychology of it means a lot. You can be armed the same way and ah, still there's all the difference in the world how you ah, stand up against adversity. Yeah. Trying to think of what else we haven't covered.

**Question:** I think we pretty well covered unless you can think of something else. When you see a flag go by in a parade, what's that mean to you?

## Dean Ladd

Tape 1 of 1

**Answer:** Well course that means a lot. It represents you know, a lot of lives that have been given for their country. That's the reason that I just came from the Exchange Club luncheon and one of our projects is handing out flags to wave for the, we have a what's called the Torchlight Parade here and it's a lot of military in there and we'll hand out oh, maybe 15 to 20,000 of these little flags and all the kids all of 'em wave. I'm thinking everybody's looking forward to it.

**Question:** Wow. It's nice to see when it's displayed proper I'll tell you to stand in, I've been lucky to be at the dedication of memorial to Vietnam and to Korea, but to be around veterans and when that flag comes in and they will experience something I'll never be able to experience but to be able to see it and understand a little bit of what it was like.

**Question:** What was the hardest part of being in the service?

**Answer:** Well of course, you have long periods of boredom you might say and you have these short periods that are highly intense and ah, you're constantly training new people all the time, constantly doing it. So ah, so main thing I suppose, the main thing is like in my case five years.

**Question:** How did you pass, in that boredom, what did you do to break the boredom?

**Answer:** Well course it's you're usually training. You're either training or you're getting rested up or you know, lot's of time you're getting a short leave somewhere so that, you remember all the good times and tend to, ah you know, don't remember the other times.

**Question:** So what was, when you were BS-ing with buddies and stuff what did you guys talk about?

**Answer:** Well I guess probably mostly the good times you've had in Liberty unit. And you know that's, you try to live it up as much as you can before the next time that you probably won't make it, you know. So, so many like in New Zealand, they'd be ah, they wouldn't come back when they're supposed to and they'd be AWOL, away without leave, and end up in a brig and then when you're ready to leave again to go into combat, ok they'll all take another break and probably many of them won't make it. Sad you know. Couldn't blame 'em, wanted to have all, get as much living as they could before they were killed. They were just kids.

**Question:** That's the hardest thing to realize is this.

**Answer:** When I, that's one thing that, that ah, my frame of mind when I, just after the war was over when I'd hear about people that died, you know, they were in their eighties and couldn't feel sorry at all. Here they'd lived their life, you know. But think of all the ones I knew that were teenagers that lost their life before it even got started. That ah, something beyond my mind, thinking about it. Now I'm eighty, I'm one of those guys (laughs).

**Question:** Thank you very much.