

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM LUPINACCI

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH

EAST BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

EDWIN ROBINSON

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with William Lupinacci on March 30, 2012, in East Brunswick, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth ...

Edward Todd: ... Edward Todd ...

Matthew Werblin: ... Matt Werblin ...

Ryan Thomas: ... Ryan Thomas ...

SI: Also in attendance is ...

Merlyn Lupinacci: ... Lynn Lupinacci.

SI: Mr. Lupinacci, thank you very much for having us here today.

William Lupinacci: You're welcome.

SI: Thank you both for your hospitality. To begin, tell us when and where you were born.

WL: I was born in Highland Park, [New Jersey], on February 17, 1926.

SI: What were your parents' names?

WL: My father was William Lupinacci and my mother was Elizabeth Lupinacci. Her maiden name was Ghilino, Elizabeth Ghilino. She migrated from Italy and my father was born in this country.

SI: Had his parents been born in Italy?

WL: Yes, they were born in Italy.

SI: Starting with your father's side of the family, do you know anything about where they came from in Italy or why they came to the US?

WL: No, I don't. I know more about my mother's side.

SI: Looking at your mother's family, what do you know about their background in Italy?

WL: Well, my grandfather was a miner over in Italy. What happened, he wanted to come to the United States, so, they came from the area of Genoa. They came to the United States through Ellis Island, [New York]. They got a job. They had to have jobs before they came to this country and, for some reason, he was oriented to go to--where was that, Lynn?

ML: Kansas.

WL: Oh, Kansas, yes, West Mineral, Kansas, as a miner. That's where he migrated. The whole family went there.

SI: How old was your mother when she came over?

WL: I guess about fourteen. She was very young, yes.

SI: Did she ever tell you what it was like to come over on the ship and make her way out to Kansas?

WL: No, not really, plus, they had four brothers. They also came.

SI: What brought the family back East? Do you know how long they were out in Kansas?

WL: I really don't know. I think there were some relatives that lived here. They came from Italy; what part, I don't know. They told them to come to this area. They lived in Brooklyn, New York, and they migrated here in Jersey. That's about all I know. They bought some property in Highland Park, New Jersey. That's where they really settled down.

SI: Do you know how your father's family came to Highland Park?

WL: It was my mother's family.

SI: Your father's family did not live in Highland Park?

WL: No, they lived in Connecticut, Stamford, Connecticut. I don't know too much about that. I know more about my mother's side than my father's.

SI: Do you know how your parents met?

WL: No, I don't, really. [laughter] I know that he became a chiropractor many years ago. Then, I don't think that worked out and he got the job with the government, with the Raritan Arsenal here in Edison, many years ago.

SI: He had also been in the service.

WL: He was over in France. What years, I don't know, but he was a bugler.

SI: Had he been in combat in World War I?

WL: I don't think he had any combat duty, but he was over in France. That's about it.

SI: Did he ever tell you any stories about his service?

WL: Not really, no.

SI: Do you know when he started working at Raritan Arsenal? Was it early on?

WL: Oh, it was quite [early], oh, very; when he first came from Connecticut, I guess, he got a job there. Like I say, he went to school--I don't know the particulars--but he went to school for [training as a] chiropractor. He was in business for a while. I guess it didn't turn out, so, he got this job in the Arsenal.

SI: What are your earliest memories of growing up in Highland Park?

WL: I have good memories. Like, you talk about the Depression, we were very fortunate. My father worked for the government and we always had food on the table. There were hard times, but nothing like my wife's family. It's a little different. We had nothing [we were] really struggling with. The only trouble is, years ago, everything was "in the book." You go to the store--you'd get paid once or twice a month--they put your name in the book and how much you bought. At the end of the month, you would pay them. That's the way [it worked], in our area, anyway.

SI: You would go to the local butcher or grocer.

WL: Our local stores, yes, they would do that.

SI: What part of Highland Park did you grow up in?

WL: I lived at what they called "The Racetrack." It was the upper part of Highland Park. There were all different sections. The section I was in was mostly Italians and Hungarians. We had a good life. The children, the guys were much older than me, the kids, [when] we played baseball, they'd always make sure the younger kids played. We had a good childhood there.

SI: On your street, you said it was mostly Italians and Hungarians. Did everyone get along?

WL: Oh, very well, always, had no trouble. We played ball every day. Like, if we had a team, they'd pick the good guys and the little guys, like myself, they'd always make sure we played and played hard. We don't fool around. [laughter]

SI: What kind of things would you do for fun growing up?

WL: We used to do a lot of hiking; like, I lived on the Highland Park side, where the bridge is going over, the Goodkind Bridge? We used to go there maybe twice a week, get a bunch of potatoes and go in the woods and cook the potatoes and climb trees. We made our own toys, like, we had what they called nip stick. You'd get a piece of a broom handle, about this long, about four inches wide, and you'd make ends on it. You hit that and see how far you could hit it, or we'd get an old rim from a bicycle, which had no tires on it, and roll that around

SI: You said that, since your father had steady employment, the Depression had less of an impact on you. Could you see it impacting other family members, people in your neighborhood?

WL: Oh, yes. We always helped each other out. In fact, during the winter months, it was hard to get fuel for some people. So, each week, we'd get together in our neighborhood and cut a tree down. We'd cut the tree down, cut it down, give it to one family. We did this, and so, we had wood. Years ago, there was no oil. Everything was pea coal, coal. Then, we had the big room, with three, two walls, and you'd make another wall. The guy would come with coal on his back and throw it in that bin, be full of coal. Every time you needed coal, you had to shovel it and put it in the furnace. That was something else. That was my job every morning, to bank the coal. You banked it at night; it'd be colder than hell, heck. You had to get up, make sure [it was fueled], so [that] the heat would be in the house.

SI: Did you have any siblings?

WL: Yes, I had two sisters.

SI: Were they older or younger?

WL: One younger, one older. One sister lives in Arizona and the other one lives in Texas. They're doing very well.

SL: Tell us more about other chores that you had around the house.

WL: Well, we would have the coal furnaces, we had to pick the coal out of the sifter, the ashes. With the ash, you would put it on the driveway and we'd pick the coal and reuse the coal. We had our own chickens for food. That's about [it].

SI: Did you have a garden?

WL: Oh, yes, a garden, we had the chickens, yes.

SI: Would people in the neighborhood trade things? You mentioned you cut down this tree to help a family.

WL: Yes. No, that was the most important, is the wood, but we always helped out. We had a good neighborhood. When you had food, like, for instance, every Saturday, this one family that I was very close with, she would cook bread. Every Saturday, all the guys would go and she'd give us a big loaf of bread and rip that up. [laughter]

ML: Don't be telling the stories about the wine. [laughter]

WL: Oh, no, that's something. [laughter]

SI: Being in an Italian family and being in an area where there were a lot of Italian families around, did you grow up with a lot of Italian traditions or culture around you, things that you kept up in your family?

WL: Well, we did, like, during the holidays, we'd have certain foods, seven fishes, but, once we broke up, we don't do that anymore. I tried to keep it myself, but I'm the only that eats it.
[laughter]

SI: Since your mother came from Italy, did she ever speak Italian in the home or try to teach it to you?

WL: That's the one thing that was very unfortunate for me. They would speak Italian to each [other], my mother and grandmother, but they would never teach [us]. I would pick up [words]. Usually, you take the Greek families, they would get their kids with their grandfather, they would speak their language. We never did that. It was unfortunate. I really would like to have done that.

SI: As a teenager, did you have to get part-time or summer jobs to help make ends meet?

WL: Oh, yes, I worked. My father worked for the Arsenal. When I was sixteen years old, I got a job in the small arms department. They needed somebody to get paraphernalia from the Pentagon. So, I was a courier to the Pentagon once a week.

SI: Really?

WL: Yes. I would get a car to the Penn Station in New Brunswick with a suitcase and I'd go to Washington. Somebody would pick me up and go into the--what is it again?

SI: The Pentagon?

WL: The Pentagon, yes, (3D?), I remember that. That was a good experience.

SI: I am trying to figure out what year you would have been sixteen.

ET: 1942.

SI: The war was on. The war had started when you had this job. You were going down to the Pentagon after the war had started.

WL: Right.

SI: There must have been a lot of security.

WL: Oh, yes, a lot of security. Then, what happened--well, that's about it there.

SI: Before that, had you had any other jobs, like a paper route or anything like that?

WL: Yes, I used to deliver a magazine, once a month. You'd get a little toy if you got so many issues sold. I worked in a local store, but that was about it, nothing.

SI: Tell us a little bit about your early education, what schools you went to in Highland Park.

WL: I went through--what happened was, I went as far as the ninth grade. Then, what happened, my brother-in-law went into the Marine Corps and my sister went down there to see him and she took me with her. Well, I was a Marine since then. I quit school and I joined the Marine Corps when I was seventeen.

ET: Pop, can you tell them how you finished high school?

WL: Oh, yes. Well, when I come back from the service, I said, "I've got to go back to school." So, I went back to Highland Park and I was doing well, but, every afternoon, I was going to the local bar and having a couple of beers. The teacher said, "Bill, do me a favor, don't go to the bar."

MT: This is after you were already in the Marine Corps.

WL: Oh, yes.

SI: That was after you were overseas.

WL: Oh, yes, when I came back, yes.

SI: You left school when you were in the ninth grade to go into the service.

WL: The ninth grade, yes.

SI: How old were you then? You said you were seventeen.

WL: Seventeen, yes.

SI: There was no gap between leaving school and enlisting.

WL: No, no, right.

SI: What did you think of your schooling before you left for the Marines? What were your favorite subjects? What did you think of the quality of the schools?

WL: I was never a good student. Yes, I was always thinking of going out fishing or hunting, not going to school, which was very bad, I know. [laughter]

SI: It sounds like you had a lot of freedom to kind of go around on your own, go into the woods.

WL: Oh, yes.

SI: Did you ever travel beyond Highland Park? Would you come down to New Brunswick? Would you go even further, to New York City?

WL: Well, what happened, my father got transferred to Stockton, California, and I went there for about six months with him. When I come back, that's when I joined the Marine Corps.

SI: What did you do when you were out in California?

WL: Nothing, just hang around.

SI: Before we get into World War II, there was a lot of build-up to the war. The Japanese were doing things in the Pacific, Hitler and Mussolini were taking over parts of Europe. Did you follow the news coming out of these areas overseas where trouble was brewing?

WL: Yes, I followed as much as I could, the Pacific mostly, and both, because I had a lot of friends that were in the Marine Corps that were older than me. They were over in Guadalcanal. When these guys come back, they were telling me about [the war]. It was so different than like when Eddie was in. It was mostly jungle fighting. They were the first ones that really did see combat and they didn't know what they were getting into, because those Japs in there were like rats. They were all over the place. They would intercept your troops. If they were behind you, you wouldn't even know it. So, they had a lot to learn.

SI: Before Pearl Harbor was attacked, when the war started in Europe, was that something you followed? Did you think that America would eventually get into the war?

WL: I never really thought about it, to tell you the truth, no.

SI: I know that a lot of people wanted the US to stay out of the war. Was that discussed in your neighborhood or among your friends?

WL: No. After, when Pearl Harbor [was] hit, we had to do it, naturally, but we never discussed that for some reason. All we talked about was playing ball, which was probably wrong.

SI: Did you get a sense from your father of how the build-up to the war, the early part of the war, was affecting his work at the Arsenal?

WL: No, not really. He never [did].

ML: Can I say something?

SI: Sure.

ML: Just referring to what he was just talking about, you're asking him about if he watched-- years ago, we didn't have television. You didn't grow up like the kids today. You're so aware of everything today. You didn't even know it was going on unless you heard your parents talking about something. Years ago, you didn't discuss stuff like families do today. Everything was silent. You didn't disturb adults, sometimes. So, it's kind of difficult--you probably find it strange--that, today, everything is TV and radio and you know everything that's going on. Years

ago, you didn't. That wasn't part of your world. He found the Marines marvelous and that's why he wanted to go into it. It was a different thing. It was quite different.

SI: That is one of the reasons we are doing interviews, to find out what it was like at the time.

ML: Quite different.

WL: Well, I was very naïve about anything, even when I was in the service. [If] they'd told me to jump off the bridge, I'd jump off. [laughter]

ET: A Marine.

ML: Well, I keep asking, but I haven't let him do it. [laughter]

SI: Did your family talk about politics at all or what they thought about Franklin Roosevelt, for example?

WL: No, we never did, no.

SI: Was your family involved in anything else in the local community, like the church or any community groups?

WL: Yes, my father was, in Highland Park, with the church. In fact, the priest came over a couple of times, a lot of times.

SI: Which church was it?

WL: It was St. Theresa's in Edison, right on the border line of Highland Park, in that area. In fact, I just read in the paper, they may close it, a small church from New Brunswick.

SI: Was the church important to your family and to you growing up?

WL: Yes. That's when we always went to church. That's the one thing we miss now; we can't get to church.

ML: Now, we don't have a car.

WL: But, the priest comes once a month.

SI: Tell us about where you were and how you heard the news about Pearl Harbor and the attack there.

WL: I was just coming from a ball game, me and my father and a couple of friends. We were just coming from the Giants and I don't who the heck it was. We heard on the radio. That's when I heard it. [Editor's Note: On December 7, 1941, the New York Giants played the Brooklyn Dodgers (football team) in New York City's Polo Grounds.]

SI: You were coming from that game.

WL: We were coming from the game, yes.

SI: Was there panic initially? What happened?

WL: Not really, we're just a little [concerned], "What's going to happen next?" That's what I was thinking about, never even thinking of going into the service at that time.

SI: You were about sixteen then.

WL: Yes, sixteen.

SI: Did anybody in your family or your neighborhood start talking to you about the service?

WL: Well, a lot of guys, they got drafted. A lot of the older guys went. We missed them, because they were our friends. Like you say, in the summertime, we used to have a recreation director that would come in our area. They'd bring a bunch of balls and bats and we'd sit and read the paper about the Yankees, the Giants, the Dodgers. We had a good rapport with the guys.

ML: That was a neighborhood get-together you had, up until about ten years ago.

WL: Oh, yes, that was ten years ago.

ML: All about his age, all from the service.

WL: Oh, they were older, naturally. They're all gone now. [laughter]

ML: Older.

SI: You said you were hearing from them. Would that be when they came back on leave?

WL: On a leave, yes.

SI: You always had it your mind that you were going to go into the Marine Corps.

WL: Oh, yes, definitely. Once I went to Parris Island, that was it.

SI: Did you do anything to prepare yourself before you actually enlisted?

WL: Well, I used to work out a lot. You'd never know it, but I was in pretty good shape. I used to have a bayonet. I used to throw it, a big bayonet, against the garage door.

ML: That's how he fell for me, literally fell. I don't know if I should insert that. That's a joke with us. [laughter]

SI: Before the war?

WL: After the war.

ML: He played baseball. I happened to live next store to his sister, my family did, and he's coming from a baseball game. I'm sitting on the porch. I always kid him, because I guess he was kind of showing off a little bit. His little niece was sitting on the porch. He says, "Hi-yah, Bonnie," ran and fell flat on his face. I said, "That's when he fell for me." He wanted to know who the girl was sitting on the porch. [laughter]

WL: Yes.

SI: Tell us about the process of enlisting in the Marine Corps, what that was like.

WL: Well, I went to the recruiting office and I had to get, naturally, my mother and father to sign, because I was young. They accepted me. I had all my physicals here. Then, I went into New York. They gave me my papers. I went on December the--where the heck is it? Here, that's the card they sent. What does that say?

SI: December 20, 1943.

WL: Yes, that's when I left.

ET: When you joined, did you get to choose what your MOS or job was?

WL: No, that's the biggest mistake I ever made, because I was into small arms, because I worked in the Arsenal, and I never told them that. I could, maybe, [have] got a job as an armorer or something, but I never did. That's why I say I was very naïve. What they told me to do, I did. [laughter]

ET: You ended up being an infantryman.

WL: Infantryman, yes.

SI: How quickly did they send you down to Parris Island? What was that trip like?

WL: Oh, it was good. We took a train, naturally. We all went to New York, said good-bye to my family. I'd never left house when I was a kid. Once I left, I never forgot my [home, but it] never bothered me about being away from home.

SI: Had you been outside the state before then, other than maybe to New York City?

WL: No, just like I said, I was in California.

SI: I forgot.

WL: But, that's all. I'd never been out.

SI: On the train to Parris Island, what was going on in your mind? What happened when you actually arrived?

WL: Well, I was all *gung ho*. I was ready to go. I really enjoyed [it]. It was tough. It's much different. Everybody says it's different and it is. When we [marched], we [marched] in sand, we never had any blacktop to do any marching. Everything was sand. We'd get up early in the morning. I guess Eddie did the same thing. We used to get up about five o'clock, grab the guy alongside you, put him on--this is no kidding--on your back and run around the field. You do that, Ed?

ET: Yes.

RT: You said that you went with your sister when she left with her husband to go join the Marines. Did you serve with him?

WL: No, he was much older than me. What happened, he was a drill instructor down there. He was *gung ho*, always sharp. Boy, that was really great. [laughter] Then, when I come home, I said, "I've got to do that."

SI: Did your brother-in-law and friends kind of prepare you for what to expect at Parris Island?

WL: Yes, they told me just what to expect. "It's not going to be easy," which it wasn't. It's funny--I enjoyed it. I liked that, get a couple of boots in your rear if you misstep or something. [laughter]

SI: Do you remember your drill instructor?

WL: No, I don't, no. That's one thing, like, when Ed was in, it was different, because I never had any pictures taken together, like a group picture. You guys did, didn't you?

ET: Yes.

WL: We didn't do that. I don't understand why.

ET: I know, sometimes during the war, they shrank training to get people into the war quicker. I was wondering, did that happen with you?

WL: Well, we'll come to that. I was very lucky, like I told you. I don't know if you want to get that part yet, but, when I got into the Marine Corps, we were on a rifle range and I'd come down with the mumps. That really saved me. Through all the war, I'd really think of that. After I went [to the hospital], all those guys, they went into Okinawa. The majority of them got killed

when I was in the [hospital] in Parris Island. I went to a guard company in Maryland, Indian Head, Maryland, which the town was under martial law. We took care of the town and, if there was any trouble, we were the people that would do it. I was there for about six months, and then, I went to Quantico, Virginia. Then, from there, I went to Camp Pendleton, [California]. [Editor's Note: Indian Head, Maryland, was home to the Naval Powder Factory, which produced ballistite powder-based rocket fuel, smokeless powder and Explosive D during World War II.]

SI: You enlisted in the Marine Corps in December of 1943 and they sent you right to Parris Island.

WL: Yes.

SI: How long were you in Parris Island for?

WL: I think seven, six months.

ET: It is normally three months.

WL: Three months, yes.

SI: You were there for the winter and early Spring of 1944.

WL: Yes, right.

SI: What kind of things did they train you in at Parris Island? What stands out the most about your training?

WL: Is obedience and do what they tell you. They drilled that into your mind, right? [laughter]

ET: That's right.

WL: "You walk over that bridge," go over.

SI: Obviously, there was a lot of discipline. Does any of that stand out in your memory, how they disciplined the recruits?

WL: It's something that stays with you all your life, I'll tell you that. Talk about discipline, that's [the] most [important] part of the Marine Corps, is discipline. That makes you do everything. They brainwash you, right?

ET: That's the truth.

SI: Were there certain methods that stand out in your mind?

WL: Not really. It's all according to what your drill instructor was. If he's tough, they make it tough, and they were bad, some of them.

SI: Do you remember your guy being particularly tough?

WL: Well, I know one incident, this friend of mine, he went to knock on the door, "Private So-and-So wants to talk to you." All of a sudden, this bayonet comes right through the door, almost hit him in the [body], right through the door.

ML: Tell them about the dog.

WL: Oh, that was something else; that was in the guard company. I was what they called a supernumerary. When you're on guard, if anybody got sick, they would call you. So, we got a call into town. Like I said, it was under martial law. They said, "Lupinacci, come on." So, I go with the sergeant. There was a dog, a rabid dog, in the doghouse. "Go get that dog." I had to get that dog out of there. That was a job. [laughter] I had to throw a rug over his head. That was a lousy experience, but that was that.

SI: Does anything stand out about the men you trained with at Parris Island, where they were from, any personalities that stand out?

WL: Well, everybody was pretty good, but we had a couple of--I think every outfit had it--people that were really slob. They never took a bath. So, we took care of them pretty good. We stripped them down, threw them in there and washed them ourselves.

SI: With your Italian background from New Jersey, did you ever encounter anyone who did not like that fact or did you face the old "North-South" issue?

WL: Not really, no.

SI: Tell us about your graduation from Parris Island, what that was like, what it meant to you.

WL: Well, it's not like they had. It was very, just nothing really. They just congratulated [us] and [said], "Now you're a Marine." "No, sir," but it was nothing like today. Like, guys talk about that; we never had that.

SI: Did they have a ceremony where they gave you your Globe and Anchor?

WL: No, they just shook your hand, nothing. I could never understand that. The guys, like, Ron and them, they had all this. We never had any of that, even, like, I never had dress blues. Everybody had dress [blues]; I never got that. I liked the greens anyway.

SI: Did you get a chance to go home or were you directly assigned to Indian Head?

WL: No, I had an extended leave for about a week. Then, I had to go back to Indian Head, Maryland, yes.

SI: What was that like, now coming home as a Marine?

WL: Oh, it was great. Oh, you're proud, all your ribbons or whatever, but it was good.
[laughter]

SI: You were at Indian Head for six months. You said it was under martial law. Why was that?

WL: Well, it was a small town and they didn't have any cops. Actually, it was a powder factory. They made missile powder. They had a bunch of women from West Virginia and sailors. There would be maybe two bars and maybe five or six stores--that was the town. So, I don't know why, but we were in charge of the whole town.

SI: Was that your only duty there?

WL: No. Well, we had to go in to guard the factory. We had different posts all through the compound there.

SI: Did you get to interact much with the workers?

WL: Oh, yes, a lot of girls. [laughter] They were the good, old days.

SI: In policing the town, were there a lot of problems or did everyone pretty much stay in line?

WL: No, a lot of fights between the Marines and the sailors. There were a lot of sailors that worked in there, in the powder factory, and there was always some kind of a conflict, but nothing serious.

SI: Were there any accidents at the powder factory? I know powder factories were particularly dangerous.

WL: No, no.

SI: You were at Parris Island until early spring, and then, you were at Indian Head for six months, you said.

WL: Yes.

SI: In the Fall of 1944, you were sent to Quantico.

WL: Yes.

SI: How long were you there for?

WL: About four or five days. The way that we went to Quantico, they'd put us on one of those Higgins boats [Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel (LCVP)]. We stand up and it was right across the river, the Potomac River.

SI: Did you do any training there or was it just for transit?

WL: No, just for transit.

SI: Tell us about crossing the country and going to Camp Pendleton, what that was like and what you expected to find.

WL: Well, I'll tell you, going cross-country was not a bad [experience]. We went by train and that's the first time I had KP duty, was on a train. The only thing I got, when we got to the West Coast, I'd seen those big mountains, it was thrilling. I'd never seen mountains like that before, but that was nothing [important].

SI: Were you sent over as part of a unit or were you sent over as an individual replacement?

WL: We were, actually, individuals.

SI: How long were you at Camp Pendleton before you were sent overseas?

WL: About two months.

ET: At Camp Pendleton, is that where you got attached to the Fifth Marine Division or was that later on?

WL: No. I joined the Fifth when I was at Camp Tarawa out in Hawaii.

SI: You were at Camp Pendleton for two months. Did you have to do any training there or was it just waiting?

WL: Just waiting for transit, that's all, yes.

SI: What did you do to occupy your time for those two months?

WL: Well, we played ball and went to town, nothing. We never did any [military training], maybe an inspection on Sunday or Saturday, but that was about it.

SI: When you went to town, did you go to San Diego?

ET: Oceanside, maybe?

WL: There's so many little towns that I don't remember, to tell you the truth.

SI: I was just curious how the locals treated the Marines.

WL: Very good, oh, yes. They treated us well. I'm trying to think of the small town. I can't remember it.

ET: Oceanside?

WL: No; [San Juan] Capistrano, but those people were nice, very good.

SI: When were you shipped out of Pendleton and sent overseas?

WL: I don't remember. Let me see [referring to his records]; I don't have that. I'm trying to figure the time. April the 5th, I think, "Overseas on the *Crockett* [(APA-148)]." That was the APA we were on, April the 5th of '45.

SI: What was the voyage overseas like?

WL: It was hectic. There were only two ships and the Japanese were in that area that we were. It took us about a month to get to Hawaii, because they thought they were following us, but that was something else. It was the scuttlebutt that we were going to go to Iwo Jima, but we went off of Tarawa. We went and pulled there. Why we went there, I really don't know. We pulled right along Tarawa, Camp Tarawa, rather, and we stayed there for about three days. Then, we pulled out and we went to Hawaii. There was scuttlebutt that, instead of going to Hawaii, we were supposed to go into Iwo Jima, and then, they secured the island. [Editor's Note: The aerial bombardment phase of the Battle of Iwo Jima began in June 1944 and was accompanied by a three-day naval shelling prior to the US Marine Corps' amphibious invasion on February 19, 1945. The island was declared secure on March 26, 1945.]

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: We were talking about your voyage overseas. You went close to Tarawa and you were shipped back to ...

WL: For some reason, we pulled right along--in fact, my brother-in-law was on that island. He was on that. He was on a forty-millimeter there, but we stayed there for two days. Why, I don't know. Then, we pulled out and we went to, supposedly, they say, like I said, go to Iwo and they must've secured the island. That's what we heard; it was the scuttlebutt. So, we went to Hawaii. It was at Camp Tarawa, that's where the Fifth Division formed. That's where I joined the Fifth Division. When we got there, all the guys were coming from Iwo Jima and they were [veterans]. Then, we start forming the Fifth Amphibious Corps.

SI: Up to this point, the Marines you had been serving with had not seen combat.

WL: No, no. They were just like me, no.

SI: When you had contact with these guys who had served in Iwo Jima, what did they tell you about what to expect?

WL: Nothing, never one word, but these guys were all shot up, just like Eddie.

SI: I know that the idea the Marine Corps had was that they would take the veterans and sprinkle them into these units to help the new guys get acclimated better.

WL: Oh, yes. In fact, I got those three guys in that picture there; take that off, Ed. These guys were on Iwo Jima.

SI: They did not talk about their experiences.

WL: No.

SI: Did you learn things from them that you would not have learned in training?

WL: Oh, yes. They were (DeSantis?) and (Fabos?). They were two guys. We intermingled with them. There's a lot of them, a lot of the guys that I was onboard ship, didn't [come]. We had about six of them that joined this outfit. I don't know where the rest went.

SI: What kind of things would you learn from them that you did not learn at Parris Island?

WL: Really, not that much. They never talked about it. We did the training and never talked. It's funny. They never talked about the war. Even amongst themselves, they didn't.

SI: Once you were assigned to the Fifth Amphibious Corps, what unit within the Fifth were you assigned to?

WL: The 26th Marines, Fifth Division, yes. That's what [US Marine Corps Medal of Honor recipient John] Basilone was in.

ET: Okay.

SI: What was your job in your unit?

WL: I was an infantryman. I carried, let's see, all kinds, from the BAR [Browning automatic rifle] to a carbine.

SI: How much time did you spend training at Camp Tarawa for the invasion?

WL: Every day until we left, about four or five months, every day. The same thing, the same unit, you worked with the same guys all the time. You knew just what the other guy was doing.

SI: Would they send you out on bivouacs?

WL: Yes. Well, every day, you'd go out into--it was what they called the King Ranch. It was a big ranch that the government took over. There were all kinds of fields. You'd be rolling in grass, running, twisting. Then, they had guys that'd be shooting over your head. Then, once a month, we would have to go on a forced march to the southern shore, I guess it was. We'd get on these Higgins boats and they'd take us out. It was really vigorous training.

SI: You would do simulated landings.

WL: Simulated landings, yes.

SI: In all this training, were there ever any accidents? Did anybody get hurt, even die?

WL: Yes, we had one guy; he was brought up on charges, although they couldn't prove it. We had a lieutenant. He'd stand and shoot at the guys in the field. He hit the one guy.

SI: Did he just crack up or what?

WL: No, he just was a crazy guy. He wanted to show you what a bullet feels like, I guess, I don't know.

SI: Was he a new guy or had he been in earlier battles?

WL: I don't know if he was a new guy. He was a lieutenant, all I know. Then, we had some sergeant, they thought they knew everything. We took care of him. What do you call that? Oh, geez, I forgot the word, some kind of court. We all got together, we got rid of him. I forgot the name of it.

SI: Were you there when the Japanese surrendered on V-J Day or were you somewhere else?

WL: We were there. We were ready to go into Japan and they surrendered. Like I said, then, we went into Japan. [Editor's Note: V-J Day was declared on August 14, 1945, in the United States and August 15, 1945, in the Pacific.]

SI: What was the reaction when you heard about the surrender of the Japanese?

WL: Very relieved, because we found, when we went into [Japan], we would've never got in there. I was in the Island of Kyushu. It was in this northern part, near Korea, that end. We went to Sasebo Harbor and, getting in there, we would've never made it, islands, all small islands, and they were all [fortified], a lot of weapons on there, big guns.

SI: When you were training in Hawaii, was the Fifth Amphibious Corps always out training or did you get a chance to go on R&R?

WL: No. We did R&R, maybe we went to--well, we were on the big island--so, you went into Hawaii, Oahu, for about a week. Then, we came back.

MW: What was your original perception when you joined the Marines of what you would be getting into? When you actually went to war, did you feel you had the right mindset and knew what you would be experiencing or was it a shock?

WL: Oh, yes. I accepted that. I knew I could probably go into something. Like I say, I was very lucky.

SI: You said you had the mumps in Parris Island, which saved your life by missing Okinawa.

WL: It seemed, after I did that, everything fell [into place], after the fact. Like, Iwo Jima, I missed that, Okinawa, I missed that--I was very fortunate.

SI: How long were you out of training with the mumps?

WL: About four weeks, yes, bad.

SI: Did you have to start over with a new company then?

WL: No. As soon as I got out, I just left. I was almost finished with my [training] on the rifle range, that's right.

SI: Tell us about what it was like going to Japan after the surrender.

WL: Okay. We got into Japan and we went into, like I say, Sasebo Harbor. We stayed aboard ship for about a day, and then, we went on shore. That was just like nothing to them. They accepted us, the Japanese, which they had to. They thought we were going to rape the women. They had all dressed in long pants and all that. I went out into town that night. "Hey, Lup, you want to go into town?" I said, "Yes." [laughter] So, it was crazy.

SI: Were you the first Americans in there?

WL: We're the first ones, yes, in that [area], we were the first. We stayed there exactly a month and the Army came in and we left. That's when we disbanded the Fifth Division. They just broke everything up.

SI: Had they given you any instructions on what to do, going into the harbor and interacting with the Japanese?

WL: Well, they said, "Just mind your business and don't get into any fights or nothing," which we didn't.

SI: What would you do every day for the month that you were there, just set up posts?

WL: No, we'd infiltrate into the town. They wanted us to get into town, to show that we were not going to rape their women or whatever. Just like you were on vacation, that's what it was, but it was all bombed up. We really did a job there, wow.

SI: When you went into town, what kind of things would you do?

WL: Well, we'd go into the shops, go to different the stores and mingle with the people, but nothing, that's about it.

SI: Did you ever have a conversation with any of the Japanese?

WL: Oh, yes. We talked to them, tried to. Some are wise little guys, especially around the water.

ET: Did you ever run into any of the Japanese soldiers when you were there?

WL: I'll tell you about that, yes, not there, but when I was in Guam.

SI: Did it seem strange to you at all? Up until now, most Americans disliked the Japanese at least. Did it seem strange to now be among them and interact with them?

WL: Well, I didn't, because war is war. A lot of guys did, but I figured you can't do that. They're just like we were. They didn't want war and we didn't, neither, I guess, but they started it. [laughter]

SI: Where were you quartered while you were in Japan?

WL: We had this big, long building. It was like a big shack. We stayed there. The only thing that happened, when we got in there, our rations, they made a mistake. We had pork and beans for a month. That's all we had. [laughter]

SI: After a month in Japan, you were sent to Palau.

WL: What happened, they disbanded the Fifth Division and they sent me to the Palau Islands and the Island of Koror. While we there, we had to infiltrate one of these islands. This is one of the big islands here, Babeldaob. The Koror Island, that where we were home based. We had to go in that island, get all the Japanese that are intermarried with the merchants. We had to take them and put them on [vessels], go to this Island of Koror, this smaller island. There was a big causeway there, where we would ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: You landed on Babeldaob.

WL: We didn't land [there]. That little island before that, Koror, that's where our main station was.

SI: You were sent to the other island. Were the Japanese living among the community there?

WL: Yes, well, they're intermarried. They were there many years, the Japanese. That was a big base during the war, was that big island. What happened, on Koror, there was a big causeway. When we got all those Japanese out of the island, they'd come to that causeway--we had

interpreters, naturally--they would lay all their belongings on that causeway. You'd go through them, see what they have, guns and stuff, and they would go on the ship and they would go out. We'd do that every day.

SI: What was involved in getting them out of there? Did you just go into the town and say everyone had to report in?

WL: Yes, we went in there and we had diplomats with us, Japanese. They told them that they had to go back home, even though they're intermarried. It was a shame, but they had to do that. Then, you could come back later. We had no trouble. I thought we would have some trouble, but we didn't.

SI: I know that, on a lot of these islands, there were holdouts, Japanese that were holed up in the islands.

WL: Oh, yes, there were a few, but not that bad, especially in that big island, because that was their main island during the war. On that one, across, on that Koror Island, we had a couple of planes, our planes, that were shot down, the guy's in them.

SI: Did you have to do anything with the remains?

WL: No, they took care of that; the upper echelon took their [remains].

SI: Tell us about these holdouts that were up in the jungle. Did you have to go after them?

WL: Well, we had to adjust where we went. We went all through that jungle. There were holdouts, but nothing where they could shoot at you. They had to resist because they had families; they wanted to stay there, but they couldn't.

SI: What were your living conditions like while you were on this island?

WL: We lived in pup tents. In fact, I had pictures of it, but I lost them all. We lived in little pup tents all the time. We had a big place, a big waterfall, that we'd take a shower under that.

SI: Were you a part of a unit then or was it a sort of makeshift unit?

WL: It was makeshift. Yes, it was just a bunch of Marines.

ET: Were you with the same guys that you were with the whole time or was this a whole new group?

WL: Most of the guys were the same, yes.

SI: Did you form a lot of strong friendships with the guys you were serving with?

WL: Not really; two guys, yes.

SI: The two guys in the photo?

WL: No, they were older. These are younger guys, but I'm trying to think; that was about it, as far as that was concerned.

SI: How long did that take?

WL: About a month. It was a process that [took time] and you should see the stuff that those Japanese had, pearls. A lot of Marines made a lot of money. Me, I was dumb; not really, but they took a lot of stuff off of those people, a lot of stuff they were not supposed to have.

SI: That is where you got the flag.

WL: Yes, I got the flag and I had a sword that they shouldn't have had.

SI: After that assignment was over, where did they send you next?

WL: Then, I went to Guam. There, I joined the Fourth Division. I was in the MPs. We had about twelve war criminals that we took care of. They were up for cannibalism, torture. They were big guys. I mean, they're all officers. We had to take care of them because they were on trial. Our job was to police them.

SI: These were Japanese.

WL: All Japanese, yes.

SI: Where did they have the trials? Did they have them on Guam or did they have them in the Philippines?

WL: They had them on Guam, yes. Every day, they would have [them].

SI: What did that entail, policing them?

WL: Well, we had to make sure we feed them and everything; shut that off a minute.

[TAPE PAUSED]

WL: You can turn that on if you want. We had one of them that had tried to commit suicide. He had a pencil and he couldn't find his heart. He'd go in so far. That was funny.

SI: Would you go watch the trials?

WL: No, we had nothing. We didn't watch the trials, just that was our job

SI: Were they being tried by the American military or were they being tried by the locals?

WL: The American military and they had their own Japanese lawyers. Whatever become of it, we left and came home after that.

SI: How long were you on Guam?

WL: I guess three months. I don't really know, about three months. A lot of guys, that's why I got this information, I never kept a record of nothing. All I did, I ate, slept and did my job, which was wrong, but, when you're young, you don't want to bother with that.

MW: You said you did not keep a record. You did not have a journal or anything.

WL: Nope. I should've. This friend of mine did and he sent me a copy.

SI: Was it difficult to keep your morale up during all these occupation duties?

WL: No, I enjoyed everything. It was bad and good, but I enjoyed most of it.

SI: Since you were moving between all these different units, was it difficult to get promoted?

WL: No, I was a corporal until I got out. It was hard to get a rank, especially like that, because you're always moving. You're in transit so much.

RT: Being in transit, did it hurt you in getting mail from home and things like that?

WL: Not really. They kept up pretty good with that, yes.

SI: During the war, how did you feel about the Japanese?

WL: Terrible. They were viscous. They're animals; they were animals. If they got an American, they'd kill him right away, just [like] with these war criminals. When I was on Guam, I was talking to these natives. We had a good rapport with them. They said they'd come down and they'd just chop them up. The Guamanians were nice people. We got along good with them.

SI: Did you ever consider staying in the Marines?

WL: Not really, no.

SI: Did you have a plan for what you wanted to do once you got out of the service?

WL: Nope. I came home. My father, at that time, he worked for the government to rehab veterans. I think there was a name for that, I forget. He said, "Bill, what do you want to do?" I said, "I don't know." I wanted to just think [about] what I want to do. He was a training officer, that's right, he was a training officer.

SI: Vocational training?

WL: Yes. Anybody wanted it, he would [help them]. He said, "You want to be a printer?" I said, "I don't know." I had a friend of mine was a printer, a friend of his. So, I got into the printing trade.

MW: Did you find readjusting to life back in America difficult at all?

WL: No, I was glad to be back, but I never missed home when I was overseas. It was funny.

SI: Did you ever meet up with any of your friends or your brother-in-law, cross paths when you were overseas?

WL: Yes, over in Camp Pendleton, yes. He was there on transit, too. He left before I did. He went over to Camp Tarawa.

SI: What stands out the most about your time in the Marine Corps?

WL: Hawaii, the training in Hawaii. That was one of the biggest and I enjoyed every bit of that training. It was tough, but, oh, I was skinny as a rail then.

SI: Tell us a little bit about your career in printing, what you did over the course of your career.

WL: Well, there was a small shop in New Brunswick; Christy Press the name of it was. I used to run the big newspaper press, a small one. It was a big press, but it was old, like this, a very slow press. We used to print *The Sentinel*, which is a local paper here now. Then, after I did that, he sold the business and I went into commercial printing. That was in Edison.

ML: He worked hard at it. He was a good worker.

ET: If you got into the printing business when you came home, how come you went to high school afterwards?

WL: Oh, yes, I went to ...

ET: You did that first.

WL: Oh, yes. I went there first. I'm sorry, yes, I came back, I said, "I've got to try it," but I never made it.

SI: Were you going to classes with the regular high school students?

WL: Yes, I went to classes with my buddies' sisters. They were, yes, all young kids. I was young once, but not that young. I just couldn't take it. So, I got a job as a printer. Then, I worked for Queens [Group] of New Jersey in Edison, one of the big five-color presses. That's what ruined my legs. [laughter] I retired there. I was there forty-some years.

SI: Did you get involved in any unions?

WL: Yes. It was union.

ML: He was a life member of the rescue squad.

WL: Oh, yes, that was something else. That's a lot of good years, too.

SI: How did you get involved in that?

WL: Well, when I came out of the service and I worked as a printer, I didn't do anything else. So, my buddy said, "Why don't you join the rescue squad?" I joined, I was on there for fourteen years. That was a good experience, yes, delivered a couple of babies, had a lot of things that you'd never realize, contagious diseases. It's not just accidents.

SI: In Edison or East Brunswick?

WL: In East Brunswick. I was there fourteen years.

SI: My grandfather was actually on the rescue squad in Matawan.

WL: Oh, really, yes?

SI: Like you said, you think of them just going out for accidents, but it could be a whole slew of things you could be called out for.

WL: A lot of stories.

SI: Would you mind sharing a couple of stories with us?

WL: Oh, yes. The first one was, and I remember the guy, (Tedesco?), he was going down [Route] 18 and he had an accident. He got [thrown] out of the car. He hit the abutment of the steel, where the water goes in. Well, I had to go get him out of there. He was dead; talk about blood, in my socks and everything. On Old Bridge Turnpike here, this guy went through the window. He stepped back and says, "I'm all right." Well, he was cut from right across here [the neck]. Every time he talked, you could see his vocal cords move. I said, "You'll be all right." [laughter]

RT: Did he make it?

WL: He made it, he was all right.

ML: Tell them about the drownings.

WL: Oh, drowning, I was good at that. In Sayreville, this one guy was duck hunting and he fell out of the boat, right where the powerhouse is down there. So, we went down, they called us.

You had these hooks on a rail. I pulled his gun up first, then, I pulled him up. There were a couple of those I went through. It's a very good experience.

ML: And he delivered a baby.

WL: Yes. [laughter]

SI: Do you think that your military experience prepared you for the accidents you would see?

WL: I think so, yes. The only thing I never liked was children choking or something like that, but cuts and bruises and pulling guys out of cars that are drunk, [laughter] but it was a good experience.

SI: How far away would you be called?

WL: In this area, between Milltown Road and down in ...

ML: Spotswood.

WL: Not Spotswood, down the hill. What is that?

ML: Old Bridge?

WL: Old Bridge, yes, just in our area, yes.

ML: When they first started, they didn't have any special radios. When that thing went off outside, everybody ran.

WL: Oh, everybody ran.

ML: And the first two that got there, whatever; the others had to go to sleep.

WL: That was a good experience. You learned a lot.

ML: Until they finally got the radio, you were assigned a night with someone.

ET: Were you already living in East Brunswick?

WL: Yes.

SI: Were there any other ways that you got involved in the community here?

WL: I belong to the VFW. That's about it, yes.

SI: Did you get involved with the VFW right away, when you came back?

WL: Not right away, but about six years now?

ML: I don't even remember.

WL: I go there every day.

SI: Pretty recently, though?

WL: Yes.

SI: How long have you been involved with the Marine Corps League?

WL: About five years, yes. In fact, we've got a meeting tonight, right?

ET: Yes.

SI: When you came back, did you have an opinion about veterans' organizations, whether you wanted to join them, but you could not, or that you did not feel like joining them for some reason?

WL: I didn't really feel like getting involved yet, yes, but I always supported them.

ML: His fishing, that took his time. [laughter]

WL: What are you saying?

SI: You spent a lot of time fishing. [laughter]

ET: Did you take advantage of any of the VA programs that were available when you came home?

WL: Well, I'll tell you, I get all my medicine up there--I go to Lyons--most of it. I go up twice a year. I get all my bloodwork there, plus, I have a nurse practitioner. She goes over all that, which is very good.

ML: He was in an accident in '10, November. That's when we lost the car. He's very fortunate, the way it happened, that he wasn't killed.

WL: Oh, jeez.

ML: That's why his leg's bad.

WL: You know what happened? I was going down 18, about fifty miles an hour, and my steering went. Luckily, just where it went, it was a driveway, Levitz Furniture place. I just told them I snapped my neck and that's all I remember. When I woke up, I was going down the parking lot. All the bags went out, all the bottom was shot out, all the tires were [burst]. What

happened, I hit this post and the wheels turned and hit the other set and ripped the whole bottom of my car out, ruined my car--and I had two lobsters in there I just bought. [laughter] I told Billy, "Get my lobsters." So, when I was going down there, I picked up the phone, I called 911, I said, "I was just in an accident."

ML: Those bags are dangerous.

SI: You mean the air bags?

ML: He was so bruised from the bags.

WL: Oh, I was lucky they were there, lucky I had my seatbelt on. That's about it, gentlemen, that I can [say].

SI: Did you ever use the GI Bill for any reason?

WL: Yes, I bought my house, which was down--there's a big house. They bought my house. Did you see that big house there?

SI: We actually commented on it.

ML: That was our house.

WL: When it was small. [laughter]

ML: We've been here about nine years and my son--I had fallen down the stairs a couple of times, wasn't hurt or anything--that kind of worried him, I guess. Then, one day, we were talking about something and a friend of mine's daughter bought a home and my friend went to live with her. A bomb went off in his head, he says, "That's a good idea, Mom." He went home and talked it over with his wife and daughters and decided to sell the house, because he was worried about us, and added on to his home right there and it's marvelous.

WL: Yes, this is all we need. It's got a nice porch in the back.

ML: I have my little sun porch. That's my summer home, I call it. [laughter] When May comes, we clean it out.

SI: Great. What year did you meet and when did you get married?

ML: What year did we meet?

SI: Yes. You told us that story earlier.

ML: Oh, I guess I was about twenty, let me see.

WL: Ninety years ago. [laughter]

ML: About '47. That's when I said, kiddingly, he fell. His sister and mother, who lived on the other side of us, decided to get together and said, "Why don't we get them together?" So, they gave him my phone number and he called me. We went to dinner, we went to Asbury Park and we loved to dance. That really hit it off for us and that's how we met. I guess we were married about a year-and-a-half later.

SI: How many children do you have?

WL: One, William.

ML: We have one son and two beautiful granddaughters, back there somewhere. One of them went to Rutgers. She graduated from Rutgers, and then, she decided she wanted to be a speech therapist.

WL: Ali.

ML: So, she is back. She just finished up Kean College. She's waiting for her test, see if she gets her license, and the other, Taryn is a special ed. teacher up in Bridgewater. Yes, so, they were adorable. We enjoyed them so much, but my son and my daughter-in-law are lovely. They're so good, always there for us.

ET: He wants to show this, his yearbook from the Fifth Marine Division.

RT: Do you still keep in touch with any of the guys you were with or did you for a while?

WL: I did for a while, two guys. One was from Chicago, the other was from Pennsylvania, but I haven't for about ten years now.

ET: Did your unit have any reunions that you went to?

WL: No. It's a funny thing, Ed, on my discharge, it says, "All over the Pacific." I had Occupation of Japan, then, after, "All over the Pacific." I could put anything in there. About ribbons, I don't know.

ET: I know, from my experience being in the service during wartime, did you ever even get a chance to wear your dress uniforms?

WL: Never, never; I never had the blues. I don't like them. They're for glory boys. [laughter]

SI: Is there anything you would like to add to the record?

WL: No, that's about it. I wish I could tell you more. It wasn't that great.

SI: No, it was very interesting. We appreciate you talking about it.

WL: I don't mind.

SI: Thanks for your time. Thank you for your service.

WL: I enjoyed it immensely. Thanks for coming.

SI: Thanks also for having us.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Reviewed by Edwin Robinson 8/9/2012

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 3/4/2013